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APOSTOLIC CHURCH
GOVERNMENT

DISPLAYED;

AND THE
GOVERNMENT AND SYSTEM
OF THE
METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

INVESTIGATED.

TO WHICH IS ADDED,

AN APPENDIX,

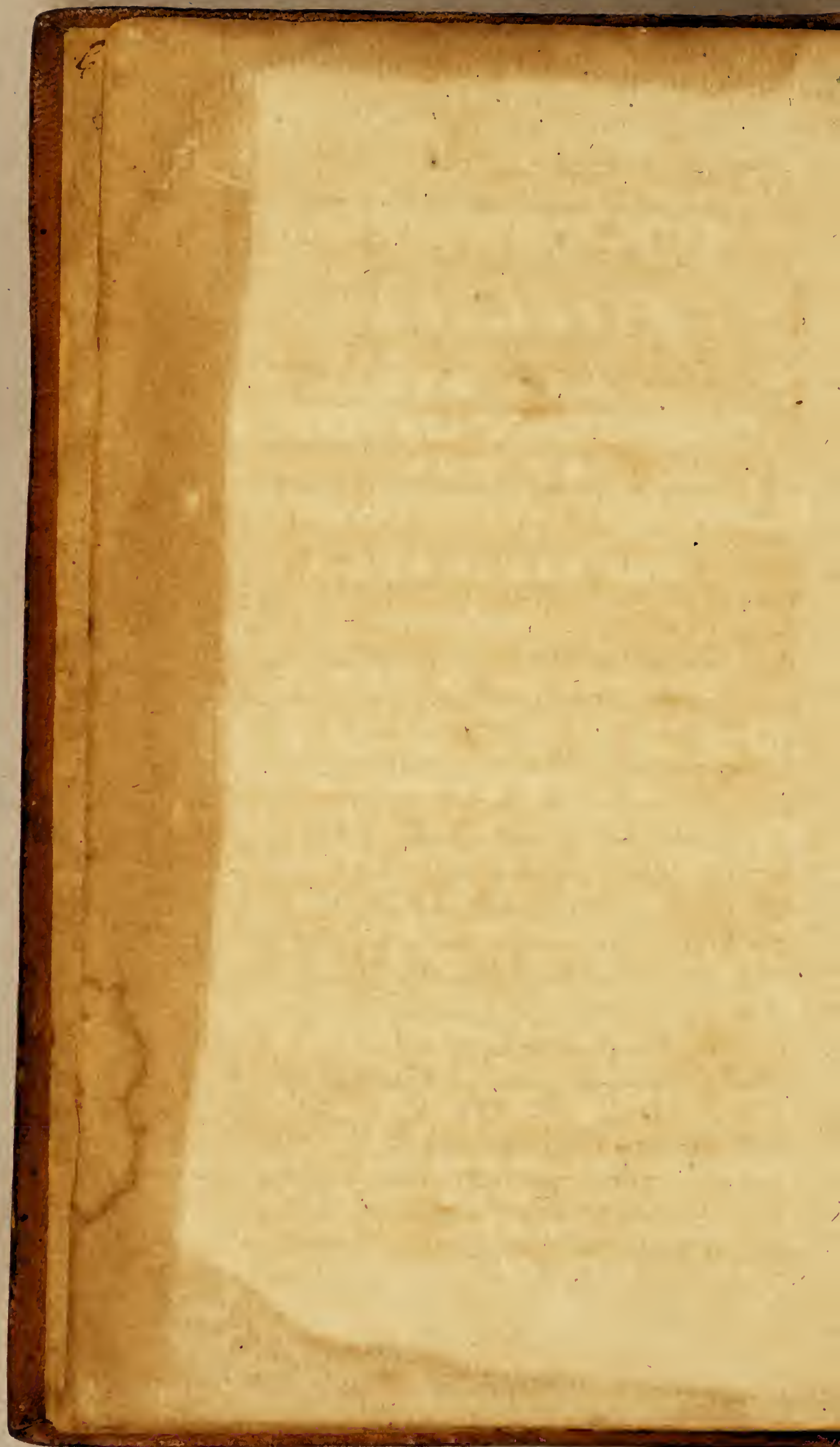
CONTAINING

*A concise DISSERTATION on the NATURE and
DURATION of the APOSTOLIC PERSONAL
AUTHORITY and OFFICE.*

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AL CHURCH in PROVIDENCE.

Prove all Things, hold fast that which is good.
1 Thess. v. 21.

PRINTED at PROVIDENCE:
BY BENNETT WHEELER, AND SOLD AT HIS
BOOK-STORE, NO. 1, WESTMINSTER-
STREET, 1798.



P R E F A C E.

TO suffer Reason, that noble endowment, that excelling gift from the Creator to man, to be trammelled by bigotry, blinded by prejudice, or enfeebled by tradition, is subversive of the beneficent design of the great donor, and lulls into torpor and supineness, that invaluable faculty : whilst its degraded possessor becomes liable to believe each absurdity of superstition, vagary of fancy, or humiliating proposition which authority may wish to impose.

DESPICABLE as this situation may appear, yet for ages it was nearly the condition of our race ; when Europe slumbered, and barbarism had enveloped Greece, Asia, and Africa, as with midnight darkness. Yes, during the triumphs of papal Rome, it was that men ceased to think, to reflect, to investigate ; sufficient was it for them, that infallibility mitred, and wearing a triple crown, had assumed the helm of the universe, disposed of nations, prostrated or exalted monarchs, changed times and laws, and regulated at pleasure each political sentiment and dogma

dogma of religion. From this lethargy of reason, and vortex of misery, the energy of a Luther, as an instrument in the hand of Deity, roused a supine world, unmasked the wily intrigues of priestcraft, and, combined with the invigorating effects of the recently discovered Art of Printing, so stimulated the human mind to investigation as caused at length the torch of science to flame around, widely diffusing political and religious knowledge through a reviving world.

THAT eventful period, brilliant in the history of man, yet shines but with feeble rays, when compared with the superior splendours of our age, wherein general knowledge, and more especially that of the rights of man, has attained to a zenith unparalleled in the annals of time.* Two consequences of this

great

* When the above was first written, hope was then sanguine, and belief cordial, in the expectation that a just idea of civil liberty had illumined, and that the permanent establishment of this liberty itself, would have rendered Republican France the seat of happiness and order. But that demonstration which has since resulted from a series of facts the most afflictive, whilst it proves these States only, to be the true assylum and repository of genuine freedom, and its concomitant train of blessings; it also obtrudes upon our view, revolutionary France as in chaotic state, where liberty has been licentiousness

great and general diffusion of knowledge deserve particular attention. The one is the increasing prevalence of toleration.* And the other the arduous spirit of enquiry which has taken place. Both being at once the offspring and the handmaids of knowledge.

It is true our time is marked by a paroxysm of infidelity, which insolently seeking to scan Deity, puts even the holy scriptures to the rack of wit, and the torture of obloquy. But as these insidious efforts of perverted reason, cannot shake truth by invective, nor overturn proof by ridicule; so neither is there any danger to be apprehended from the researches of impartial and dispassionate reason; as the constellation of divine evidences ever attendant on the sacred oracles, became but more luminous on each disquisition of that nature. Yes, as one well observes, "revelation will endure the trial even to the ten thousandth examination." Nor

A 2

should

tiousness and anarchy; where freedom now is abject submission to the despotism of Five Tyrants; and where, under the mask of patriotism, efforts of universal domination, plunder and prostrate independent republics, and seeks to reduce to barbarism itself the still remaining independent, and polished nations of the universe.

**Toleration dawned for a moment upon France, but infidelity triumphed; and toleration disappeared when the rights of conscience were violated by the abolition of the sabbath.*

should we be apprehensive for the consequences of the trial to which the several dogmas of each creed may be put in this age of investigation; as those tenets which prove genuine streams, from truth's hallowed fountain, must like their parent head, on each impartial examination, but flow more limpid to the intelligent, diligent, and candid enquirer, after truth and righteousness.

BUT is it only civil rights and doctrines of religion that justly claim the impartial scrutiny of an enlightened age? Is not a thorough knowledge of Ecclesiastical rights, also an object of magnitude, of weighty and vast importance? Are not civil and religious rights nearly allied? must they not in some considerable degree stand or fall together? If men become tenacious of one, will they not of the other also? If remiss in one, remiss likewise in the other? The rights of religion, may perhaps properly be denominated external and internal; the former relating to the connexion of different sects with each other, and with civil government; and the latter having reference to the equitable distribution of power in each community itself, or to express it otherwise, "the powers of office vested in the clergy, and powers of privilege residing in the people."

THE former rights were perhaps never better understood than in the present day, and especially in this country, where the perfect civil

civil equality of denominations is indisputably acknowledged; and where, whilst civil government affords equal rights and protection to all; yet it presumes not to interfere with any in matters which are merely Ecclesiastical. As to the latter rights, they appear to have attracted in some degree the notice of the celebrated Calvin; although his polity resembles more that form of Ecclesiastical government, gradually introduced into the churches in the second and third centuries, than it does that devised and established by the Apostles in the first age.

TOWARDS the latter part of the 16th century the Puritans in England appear to have made greater progress in the knowledge of scriptural church government, than perhaps any others of that day. But to carry those researches to still higher degrees of accuracy, and explicit arrangement, seems to have been reserved for those venerable divines who first emigrated to this country; and for the Delegates of the first settled Congregational churches of New-England; as appears from the Cambridge platform; a work, constructed and compiled by them, and which, although not destitute of defects and blemishes, is nevertheless justly applauded, and highly meritorious. Amongst the different writers, since that period, whose efforts have more especially been designed to illucidate this important subject, none perhaps has displayed

played more talents, application, or impartiality, than the celebrated Lord King, in his Enquiry into the constitution, discipline, &c. of the primitive churches. But notwithstanding the singular merit of that performance, it can by no means be considered as unexceptionable; for its author, instead of confining his researches to the limits of the first century, or as Mosheim terms it, to "The golden period of the church; ^a" he pushes them through the headlong career of three ages; so that after all his laborious gleanings from antiquity, instead of exhibiting the Apostolic model of government in its pristine form, he presents, upon the whole, a mishapen system, constituted of usurpation, blended with some remains of divine institutions. For to those acquainted with Ecclesiastical history, they are notorious facts that innovation having commenced, in the government of the Christian church, during the second century, so rapid was its progress, that before the close of the next, such a change had then taken place "in the form of Ecclesiastical government, as was followed by a train of vices, which dishonored the character and authority of those, to whom the administration of the church was committed. ^b"

BUT whatever other researches, or progress in former or in later years, may have been
made

^a Mosheim's Eccl. Hist. Vol. 1, Page 76.

^b Ibid, Page 213.

made on this subject, it is undeniable, that too many of all denominations, concern themselves but little, with enquiries of this nature; that unmindful of these rights, they heedlessly commence church members; and that as they commence, so they indolently pass the residue of their days, without due researches into the constitutional rights of their community, confiding even to credulity in the supposed perfection of their government.

BUT when the attention of mankind, awakened by the masculine voice of reason, narrowly inspects the nature and importance of civil rights and liberty; when the patriot duly apprized of their worth, and zealous for their attainment, foregoes domestic bliss, encounters toils incredible, and meets on the hostile plain, the storm and thunder of war; * shall the professor and friend of religion, drowse on in lethargy of reason? shall he remain supinely forgetful of his unalienable privileges; or unmanfully decline to examine and assert his Ecclesiastical rights? But whilst the timid are restrained by the servility of fear, the indolent forbear through the solicitations of sloth, and the bigot is withheld, by the blindness and trammels of prejudice; men, whose minds are expansive, who possess candor, and are endued with that sensibility which feels wrong and resists oppression, will think for themselves; will become

* *Luke xvi. 8.*

become tenacious of rights and privileges conferred on them by Christ himself, and carefully deposited for them, by Apostolic hands, in the sanctuary of a divine institution. Nor will such persons fail (in order fully to ascertain the nature and properties of these rights and privileges) to cast them into the crucible of a strict and rational investigation.

BUT disquisitions of this nature, might perhaps become still more interesting, if but connected with "a phenomena,"—with a new thing in the earth; with the polity of a religious community, who from a small and very feeble beginning, have, in little more than half a century, spread wide amongst the nations,* and multiplied into their numerous
tens

* *As the subsequent researches relate more particularly to the Methodist Church in America, it therefore cannot strictly be said of that community, that they are spread wide amongst the nations; but as the Methodist system in Europe, though materially different in some particulars, yet is in a great degree, similar in other respects to that in this country, and was the root from whence a great part of the latter originally sprung; therefore, though two communities and systems, in a strict and proper sense, and in some points of view, yet in other respects they are but one people and system, and in this sense, are literally dispersed wide amongst the nations,*

tens of thousands. On beholding therefore, such vast and rapid augmentation of numbers, is it not natural, and may it not be expedient, narrowly to explore their system, and minutely to examine the springs, and connexion of their political machine, in order to discover from whence is this confociation, this gathering together of the people? to see whether it arises from a superior adjustment of the powers in the polity of that community, than is to be found in the systems of other Christian denominations, or whether it is not from other and various causes combined together?

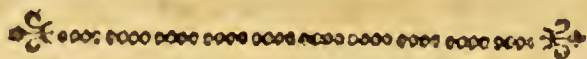
SUCH researches, if carried on within the sacred boundaries of truth, and conducted under the benign influence of candor and moderation, would hardly fail to prove, at once, interesting and instructive. But whether truth and candor are prominent features or not, in the following pages, it will remain for an enlightened public to determine, to whom they are now respectfully submitted.

BUT the author, whilst he takes the liberty of thus investigating the government and discipline of a respectable, numerous, and he doubts not, pious community, flatters himself, however, that he harbors no desire of casting a veil over what to him may appear good and excellent
amongst

nations, and multiplied into numbers, little short of one hundred and four score thousand church members, or communicants.

amongst them, nor yet to aggravate what he may conceive to be otherwise. For although not in connexion with that people, yet it was amongst those of that denomination, in Europe, that he was born and bred : there first he received ideas and impressions of religion ; amongst them commenced his labours in the Gospel vineyard ; and amongst whom, still remain his kindred as well as the friends and companions of his early youth. Nor can he at this time forbear acknowledging a respectful, affectionate, and grateful attachment to that people. And should those pages happen to fall into their possession, he solicits from them an attentive and candid perusal ; reminding them at the same time, of the saying of a great Civilian, cited on a different occasion by a celebrated writer in connexion with themselves,
*“ Let truth stand though the universe should
 “ sink into ruins.”*

Providence, June 28, 1798.



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INTRODUCTION.

Containing some general Observations on the Nature and Necessity of civil and ecclesiastical Government.—Preliminary Reflections on the Nature and Sources of that Evidence, requisite to a just Enquiry into the System of Government established by the Apostles in the first Christian Churches.—Explication of Terms to be used.

MAN appears by nature, formed for society; his wants and his wishes render that state necessary. Place him in a situation remote from men; furnish him with every advantage that nature or clime can bestow; if he subsists at all, his existence must be miserable, his condition insupportable; he pines for rational converse, for intercourse with beings of similar views and desires, who can aid in guarding against danger, and in the attainment of apparel, of food and habitation; in a word he languishes for those, who sharing enjoyment, can soothe, with sympathy, his sorrows. Give him a companion, thus and otherwise more perfectly qualified; enlarge the social scene,
by

by the arrival of new coming and wedded pairs. His condition changes ; the sable cloud disappears, that long had lowered, in melancholy, over his lonely habitation ; the sun assumes a splendour, and the starry heavens sparkle with a brightness before unknown ; whilst the constellation of social joys, beam on his enraptured mind, the vivid prospect of transmitting to a rising posterity, societies, improving advantages, through generations innumerable. But ineffable as are these rising prospects soon they must terminate in anarchy, and wild disorder, if not rendered permanent by the restrictive aids of civil Government. To preserve therefore inviolate their property from the encroachments of fraud ; their liberties from the ruthless hand of oppression, and their persons from lawless violence ; the aggregate wisdom and experience of the people must be convened ; the social compact formed ; a declaration of rights drawn up, and a system of government agreed upon, to guarantee those rights to the community. A Government, thus formed by the wisdom, and agreeable to the wishes of the people ; duly balanced by constitutional restrictions, and faithfully administered by officers, possessed of talents and integrity ; must ever hold a conspicuous rank in the list of temporal advantages, even as the guarantee of order, bulwark of society, and palladium of liberty.

BUT

BUT man being designed for immortality, and a candidate to partake hereafter the society of "the spirits of just men made perfect," and being likewise feeble and ignorant, oppressed by wants and care, as well as encompassed by dangers and foes innumerable; he therefore needs a kind, or condition of society, peculiarly adapted to this probationary state. He stands in need of all the aids that society, combined with religion, can afford; in united councils, faithful rebuke, fervid exhortation, instruction, and encouragement of example, the public ministry of the Gospel, mutual and all prevailing prayer, the extacy of joint and acceptable praise, and above all, of the fellowship and joy of fervent charity, in all its fruits of brotherly kindness, and sympathy of affection; that being practiced in the mutual duties of forbearance with, and subjection to his brethren, he may through grace, become assimilated into a temper, and disposition, preparatory to the enjoyments of that world, "where all things being made new, there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; where God himself, shall be with men, and shall make them his people, to see his face, and reign in his light and glory forever and ever."

To place man, therefore, in circumstances thus favourable, his all-wise and gracious Creator, was pleased to consociate Israel together

gether under Moses ; to appoint them laws and statutes ; to separate from the people, priests and levites ; and assigning to them ordinances, and stated periods for social and public worship, thereby constituted them into a church estate.

BUT Moses, being only a servant faithful in God's house ; and his polity in many respects, but a shadow of good things to come, it of course gave place to Christ's superior authority, who came as " a son over his own house," and as the substance of the types which went before.

THE face of the church now under the modeling hand of Christ himself, assumed a new form ; for its national and ritual systems passing away, it was constituted into a family, of which the Redeemer was himself the head ; who establishing the equality of brotherhood, amongst the members, strictly prohibited them from being called "*masters* ;" (Matt. 23 : 8, 9, 10.) and from exercising "*authority*" and "*dominion*" over each other. (Matt. 20 : 25, 26.)

BUT are we to infer from hence, that the bands of religious society were broken ; that order was inverted ; discipline relaxed ; or that the christian church, was left unorganized, and destitute of a government of divine origin, and authority ? Can we behold order, stamped on the face of universal nature, by the divine Architect ; and shall we not expect

pect to find it in the ordinances and government of the church of the living God? or will reason pronounce it consistent, that the Messiah, on whose shoulder is the government, should not himself, nor yet by his apostles, as wise master builders, model a government for his people, for his churches, gathered, planted, and builded by apostolic hands?

THAT the bands of religious society were not broken; that order was not inverted; and that discipline, requiring exemplariness of life, and conversation, in the members of the church, was not relaxed, when the yoke of Mosaic bondage, gave place to the liberty of the Gospel; are propositions, which carry in them, the evidence, and authority of maxims. And, that the Christian church was not left destitute of a system of government, of divine origin; but had one modeled by the Apostles themselves, are likewise propositions, which are admitted, in the affirmative, even by those, who deny the observance of that form to be obligatory on the churches in after generations.

BUT as an accurate inquiry, into the system of government established by the Apostles in the first christian churches, will in a particular manner, hereafter, arrest our attention, it therefore becomes expedient, briefly to premise some particulars, which in an especial manner affect that important subject. And

first, it is necessary to advert to that evidence, which adapts itself more particularly to researches of this nature. Was the object which we pursue composed of subjects merely speculative, then abstract reasoning, might afford the clue of information. Was it numbers and proportion which we sought, mathematical demonstration would in that case best apply. Or did we seek the knowledge of such matters of fact, as the eye and ear can take cognizance of, then the evidence of sense alone might afford abundant conviction. But as the enquiry proposed refers neither to speculative opinion, nor to numbers or proportion, nor yet to matters of fact, within the reach of our senses, but to transactions of that nature which had existence in far distant nations, and in a remote period of the world ; we therefore must have recourse to that kind of information which logicians term "the evidence of faith ;" and which is founded upon testimony. Testimony is termed divine and human. The former is indubitable, and is contained in "those sacred books which carry the most striking marks of a divine origin." The latter is produced, in the writings of able and judicious historians, who relate the transactions and important occurrences of their own times; or in the writings of those who faithfully compiled from others who had thus written, as well as from the archives, and most authentic records, of them
ages,

ages, and communities of whom they treat. This testimony, although not indubitable as the former; yet is in most cases, of that force and weight, as to render the rejection of it highly unreasonable and absurd. But it is to be observed, that whilst some facts and circumstances of antiquity are declared, by the former testimony alone, and others by the latter only, there are some others again, which are maintained by the concurring authority of both. For instance, that Adam was the progenitor of mankind, and that Abel was slain by his brother Cain, are matters of fact, taught us, by the sacred writings alone; whilst the destruction of Troy by the Greeks, and that Homer was the narrator thereof, are circumstances, learned from profane history only, and yet each of these propositions powerfully commands the assent of every intelligent mind, that combines candour with enquiry. But that Darius the Mede, and Cyrus the Persian, overcame Babylon, are facts sustained by the irrefragable testimony of both.

AND it should be further observed, that the enquiry in contemplation, is also of that nature as to admit of proof and illustration, from this combined testimony; for it is the special province of the ecclesiastical historian, not only truly to delineate, the rise, progress, and ceremonies of the Christian Church; but also judiciously to depict its government;

to trace its constitutional rights up to Apostolic days, and compiling faithfully from the most genuine records of them times ; to exhibit in its pristine form, the ecclesiastical polity of that illumined age : Whilst the New Testament, as the sacred charter of ecclesiastical rights, is open for all, to compare with divine statutes, and apostolic precedents exhibited therein, each assertion of the ecclesiastical historian ; nor should any thing, however plausible, be received from him, as in any wise obligatory, if inconsistent with, or not easily inferable, according to the most strict rules of impartial criticism, from this constitutional, and only infallible criterion of belief and practice. But it may here be asked, why recourse should not be had to the New Testament alone, for information on this subject ; if each assertion relating thereto, by the ecclesiastical historian, must before its authority is admitted first undergo the test of the divine oracles ? To this it may be replied, that the holy scriptures are no less the fountain of gospel doctrines, than they are the standard of evangelical arrangements in ecclesiastical government ; and yet it is admitted by almost all christian denominations, that it is expedient, to connect other means of information as explicatives, with the holy scriptures, besides that of a mere perusal of themselves, in order to the attainment of a full acquaintance with the doctrines which

which they contain. If this is not the case, why have the voluminous works of commentators on the divine word been so generally read in all ages, and by all christian denominations? Or why have preachers, so generally practiced exposition in sermonizing, if it was not designed thereby to elucidate what otherwise was supposed to have been dark and hard to be understood by the unlearned and unstable? And is it not generally considered, that a knowledge of the manners and customs of the ages wherein the scriptures were written, has a happy tendency to illustrate allusions which frequently occur in the sacred volume? And after all those aids of the commentator, the preacher, and the knowledge of the manners and customs of antiquity, is it not found, that the whole energy of the mind, is requisite to penetrate through the veil of parables, of allegory and metaphor, which hides divine truth, from the eye of the indolent and profane? But if the knowledge of the doctrines of religion is in this manner attained, by those, who in the divine word, "seek it as silver, and search for it as for an hidden treasure," (Prov. 2 : 4) will it not follow, that similar means and exertions are proper; when we seek an acquaintance with that government instituted by the Apostles, in the churches, which they every where planted? For if important doctrines of the Gospel are often so veiled

veiled under allegory, parables and metaphor, as to need illustration by the judicious and learned commentator : So in like manner the government, and various authoritative observances of the first christian churches, although evidently implied in the New Testament ; yet they many times are not clearly expressed, but are presented to view under such intimations as require the aid of the ecclesiastical historian, before their nature or authority can precisely be understood. To illustrate this assertion, and to manifest its coincidence, with the judgment and practice of the far greater part of christians, in this, and in former ages ; we only need to consider why the first day of the week is observed as the christian sabbath, in preference to the seventh. For though that change has taken place, in consequence of the resurrection of Christ having happened upon the first day of the week, yet certainly, this circumstance, however important in itself, if unconnected with other circumstances, it could by no means justify such a departure, from an institution so express, and so evidently divine as that was, which enjoined the observance of the seventh day. The christian therefore to justify such alteration, has of necessity recourse to the New-Testament as to the charter of gospel authority, and institutions ; but whilst he ponders the meaning of the members of the churches in Gallatia
and

and Corinth being directed, to lay by them in store, the collection for the saints, "on the first day of the week." (1st Cor. 16 : 2) and whilst his mind hovers dubious, on the import of the expression "the Lord's day." (Rev. 1 : 10) he is delivered from suspense, by the ecclesiastical historian, who informs that "the first day of the week was, in the first century, universally set apart for public worship, in celebration of Christ's resurrection from the dead upon that day ; and that this custom, which was derived from the example of the church of Jerusalem, was founded upon the express appointment of the apostles themselves." So that in this instance, as well as in a variety of others, we may behold the ecclesiastical historian elucidating what otherwise would remain dark and mysterious in the inspired writers, and therefore may in some cases consider the one as sowing the seed, whilst the other exhibits the full grown plant.

BUT in guarding against error, whilst we consult the ecclesiastical historian, it will be singularly important, to endeavour carefully to distinguish betwixt well authenticated matters of fact, which he relates : and those assertions, which evidently are supported by no better authority, than that of his own opinion, or conjecture. And as our researches have special reference to the system of a particular community, it becomes expedient in
 having

having recourse to the annalists of the christian church, to make more especial choice of an author, not only of distinguished talents and probity; but also of one whose tenets cannot be suspected of biasing his judgment unfavourably to the polity of that people. In this respect however, we are singularly happy, as their celebrated founder, has left us a valuable work of this kind. Nor can its merits depreciate, because originally compiled by the celebrated Dr. Mosheim, of Gottengin, and considered superior to any other then extant; nor yet because rendered still more perfect by "the ingenious Dr. Mac Laine," who translated it from the latin original. It is however to be observed, notwithstanding the qualifications which the late Rev. John Wesley so eminently possessed, to abridge a work of this kind, that his brevity will in some instances oblige us to consult the original, as translated by Dr. MacLaine; nor shall we wholly confine our enquiries to either the abridgement, or the original, but shall occasionally refer to Mr. Wesley's Notes on the New Testament, and to other respectable authorities, still however, subjecting all information from each, to the test of the analogy of scripture as before explained.

SECONDLY. As the terms "Apostolic church, and churches," will hereafter frequently occur, therefore to prevent confusion, and mistakes, it becomes necessary to explain

explain the sense, in which they shall be used. The appellation "Apostolic" is to be considered as not reaching to establishments formed in the second Century, because the immediate influence of the Apostles, cannot be supposed to have extended beyond the limits of the first. But as the revelation was made known to St. John in the year ninety-six, or ninety-seven, of the christian Era; we therefore, with much propriety, may consider that influence as pervading the churches of the first century.—The term "church," is ambiguous, sometimes it means the faithful of one family, and such others, as assemble with them for the purpose of celebrating divine worship together; (Romans xvi, 5: Col. iv, 15: and Philemon 2 v.) It is provincial, as implying all the christians of Thessaly (2d Thes. i, 1.) It is likewise often used in a sectarian sense, as the Church of Rome, Church of England, Methodist Church, &c. &c. It also has a mystical meaning, inclusive of all true christians, whether militant or triumphant; and in this sense must be considered as implying a body one and indivisible (Col. i, 18.) It is again by divines, not unfrequently nor improperly, used, as expressive of the whole body of professed Christians at one time in the world. But it has also a located and divisible import, signifying a particular community of professed Christians, covenanted to

walk together, in the faithful observance of Gospel ordinances. And it is in this latter sense, as admitting of the plural Churches, that we shall hereafter for the most part make use of the term Church: although it will some few times occur, as expressive of the whole church in its militant state.

AND in the third and last place, it is of importance to remark; that in treating of Ecclesiastical Government, evangelical discipline, necessarily involves itself in the discussion. For as church government implies the existence of officers, spiritual laws, and authority to enforce them, in a religious community; so discipline has reference to the qualifications, and conduct of both officers, and people; whilst it also implies the due enforcement of Ecclesiastical censures and admonition, towards all delinquents, without respect of persons. But as from the above view of church government and discipline, it is manifest, that the latter is in no small degree implied in the due exercise of the former; I shall therefore not attempt to distinguish them from each other, but shall consider religious discipline, as comprehended in ecclesiastical government.



PART THE FIRST.

The External Relations of the first Christian Churches. Their Composition. Rank and Order of their Officers. Number of Officers. Qualifications, Elections and Ordination. Their Legislatures, Judicatures and Executive Departments. Summary View of the foregoing System. Concise Investigation of the Authority of Churches to dismiss their Pastors, and of the latter to depart from their respective Flocks. The Depository of Power for the Admission of Church Members, and Right of Members to withdraw from their respective Churches, considered.

A COMPREHENSIVE enquiry into the government of the Apostolic churches will imply a discussion of the following particulars, viz. Their External Relations, Composition, Organization, Legislative, Judicial, and Executive Departments.

I. EXTERNAL RELATIONS. Under this head we are briefly to advert to the authority which the civil magistrate possessed over the christian church, and to consider the relation wherein one church stood unto another, within the first century.

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As to the jurisdiction of the civil magistrate, it appears to have been wholly civil, without any mixture whatsoever of ecclesiastical authority therewith : within which limits his power was sacred ; it was of God whose minister he was. (Rom. xiii, 1, 6.) But when the speculations of opinion, the ordinances of the Gospel, and the system of government, established in the first christian churches, were considered as cognizable at his tribunal, then interference became usurpation, persistence was oppression, and punishment persecution.

CONCERNING the relation wherein one church stood unto another, the Ecclesiastical Historian affords very explicit, and satisfactory information ; “ The churches (says he) in those early times were entirely independent ; each governed by its own rulers, and its own laws. Nothing being more evident than the perfect equality that reigned among the christian churches ; the smallest trace not appearing in the first century, of that association of churches, from whence, councils and metropolitans derive their origin.^a” And this condition of the churches, we learn, continued to subsist until far into the next century ; for “ during a great part of it, the christian churches were independent on each other, nor were they joined together, by any other bonds but those of charity. Each
christian

^a Wesley's Eccles. Hist. Vol. 1, Pages 59, 60.

christian assembly being a little state, governed by its own laws, approved by the society."

BUT this independence of the primitive churches is also sustained by abundant evidence from the divine word, and especially in the Epistles addressed to the seven churches in Asia. For when one is commended, and another censured; a third partakes not the rebuke, nor shares the applause, as being accessory to the preponderating good or evil, through authority exercised or omitted, over the approved or reprehended church. When that of Thytira is exhorted to purge itself from the followers and crimes of a Jezebel, and that of Pergamus, to renounce the Nicolaitanes, and disciples of Balaam; no directions whatsoever, are given to either, to call in aid from Smyrna, or Philadelphia, nor yet to convoke a synod on the occasion; but each church is considered competent to the adjustment of its respective difficulties. And in like manner St. Paul addressed the Corinthians, amongst whom disorders had prevailed, no others were reprimanded for neglect, themselves alone were laid under Apostolic censure; and they only excited to enforce discipline and restore church order. (1 Cor. v. 1, 5, vi. 5, xi. 17.)

It is however to be observed, that the appeal of the church of Antioch, to the A-

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posited and Elders at Jerusalem, as mentioned in Acts xv, has seriously been urged, as an argument against the above independence of the Apostolic churches; and been considered as a proof of the necessity, and divine authority of councils and synods.

BUT this appeal if only rightly understood, will certainly afford no support to those opinions thus predicated thereon. For, that it affected not in any degree the independence of individual churches in the adjustment of their own internal concerns, is evident and undeniable; because the question referred as above, was neither private, nor located, but was of that general and important nature as intimately to affect the whole christian world, in that and in every other period of its existence. (Acts xv. 28, 29.) And hence as such it was referred to Apostolic decision, and to the judgment of that church, which, as shall hereafter appear, was designed to have been the model of all the others of that century.

NOR yet could this appeal by any means imply either the necessity, or authority, of synods or councils; as it was a precedent, which after ages could not possibly have followed.

BUT the churches, although in this manner possessed of freedom, yet they were not in that sense independent, as to preclude a mutual interchange of council, and of acts of benevolence

benevolence amongst them. For as lord King well remarks, that "a particular church was not the whole church of Christ, but only a part or member of the universal one; and as one member of the natural body hath relation to the other members, so a particular church had respect to the other members of the universal church." In consequence therefore, of this mystical union, which subsisted betwixt them, they "were joined together by the bonds of fervent charity," which they manifested in times of dearth or necessity, by liberal donations towards each others relief. (Acts xi. 28, 29, 30. 2 Cor. ix. 1, 2.) And when any of their members had occasion to travel, by hospitably entertaining and generously forwarding them on their respective journies. (Rom. xvi. 1, 2 Cor. iii. 1, Col. iv. 10.) That the churches sought counsel of each other on particular occasions, is attested by Mosheim; from whom we learn that in times of difficulty they frequently had recourse for advice, to such as had been planted by the Apostles; reserving however the right of following, or refusing the counsel thus obtained, in whatever degree themselves judged expedient. And which testimony is strongly corroborated by the conduct of the church of Corinth; amongst whom towards the latter part of the first century, there "happened a grievous division, which obliged them to
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have recourse to other churches, and especially to that of Rome, on which occasion was written by Clement, in the name of the whole church of Rome, that famous Epistle to the Corinthians so much magnified by the ancients.^a

It is indeed difficult to ascertain precisely, what liberties one church might constitutionally have taken with another, in consequence of this mystical union which subsisted amongst them. The authors of the Cambridge platform supposed that one might have admonished another, when disorders "to the scandal of religion," prevailed therein; even as "Paul who had no authority over Peter, yet when he saw Peter not walk uprightly, rebuked him publicly before the church.^b" But this reasoning although not destitute of force; yet, it is inconclusive, as an Apostle rebuking an Apostle, was different from that of a Church admonishing a Church; and of which latter case, no one instance is to be found on the divine records.

As to one or more christian communities, having had authority to devise a criterion, whereby to unchurch, or pronounce imposters, a confociated body professing itself a church of Christ; it was unthought of in that

^a Bower's Hist. of the Bishops of Rome, Vol. I. Page 16.

^b Chap. xv. Page 43.

that age, as well as destitute of support from the word of God. For should any have professed itself of Christ, and yet denied his having come in the flesh, or after his ascension, have asserted his personal presence amongst them, &c. then to have pronounced such antichristian, appertained to Christ himself, and to his Apostles (Matt. xxiv. 23, 2. 1 John ii, 18, 22, and 2 John 7.) And when in consequence of backsliding, and unfaithfulness, a true Church, became obnoxious, to the removal of the Candlestick out of its place, or to be fouled forth into an unchurched estate; to perform these, was the prerogative, not of the other churches, but of Christ alone, (Rev. ii. 5, iii. 16.) But had one become utterly and evidently fallen and abandoned of God; then, hastily to have renounced such community, would have been a duty expressly incumbent upon all others, (Rev. xviii. 4.) Nor was authority lacking, to withdraw from those, who having had the form of Godliness, yet denied its power, (2 Tim. iii. 5.) But still, to have plucked up the tares was a work not assigned to the erring children of men; but was one reserved for officers of angelic order, (Matt. 13, 29, 30.)

2. COMPOSITION. “IN the earliest times of the church, all who professed firmly to believe, that Jesus was the only redeemer of the world, and who in consequence of this profession

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 fession, promised to live in a manner conformable to the purity of his holy religion; were immediately received amongst the disciples of Christ. This was all the preparation for baptism then required; and a more accurate instruction in the doctrines of christianity was to be administered to them after it. But when churches rose to the true God, almost in every nation, this custom was changed. Then "none (no adults) were admitted to baptism, but such as had been previously instructed in the principal points of christianity, and had also given satisfactory proofs of pious dispositions."^a

3. ORGANIZATION. This subject as having reference to the officers of the christian church, affects Rank and Order, Number, Qualifications, Election and Ordination.

RANK and ORDER. Order may be considered as having respect to sort, or kind, and Rank as referring to station, as first or last of the same order. Concerning the different orders, in the christian church, Mr. Wesley thus observes, "It was necessary, first, to appoint *extraordinary teachers*, who should erect every where christian assemblies; and then to establish *ordinary ministers*; for the best system of religion must necessarily dwindle to nothing, or be egregiously corrupted, if not perpetually inculcated by a regular and standing ministry."^b

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^a Wesley's Ec. Hi. V. 1. page 64. ^b Ibid, page 55.

The extraordinary teachers were the Apostles, Prophets and Evangelists, who for a season, were set in the church; (Ep. iv. 11.) and whose office probably expired with themselves: for as the scriptures nowhere intimate an intended perpetuity of the officers of this order; so it is evident from the silence of the Ecclesiastical Historian respecting them, in the second century; that they became extinct at a very early period.

THOSE of inferior, but of permanent order, were denominated Bishops, Presbyters, and Deacons, for "the rulers of the church were either Presbyters or Bishops^a;" and at Jerusalem "seven Deacons were chosen, by order of the Apostles, to distribute the offerings of the church, which were for the support of the poor." And "all the other christian churches followed the example of that of Jerusalem, in whatever related to the choice and office of the Deacons.^b"

"Such was the constitution of the christian church in its infancy, that a *presbyter* of remarkable piety, and wisdom ruled each congregation; it being judged necessary, that one of distinguished gravity and wisdom, should preside in the council of presbyters; and be a centre of union to the whole society. This person was, at first, styled the angel (Rev. ii. 1,) of the church to which he belonged,

^a Wesley's Eccl. Hist. Vol. i. Page 57.

^b Ibid, Page 58.

belonged, but was afterward distinguished by the name of Bishop, or inspector; a name borrowed from the Greek language, and expressing the principal part of the episcopal function, which was to inspect into, and superintend the affairs of the church.^a "Let none however confound the Bishops of this primitive and golden period of the church, with those of whom we read in the following ages. For though they were both distinguished by the same name, yet they differed extremely, and that in many respects. A Bishop, during the first and second century, was a person who had the care of one christian assembly, which at that time, was, generally speaking, small enough to be contained in a private house. In this assembly he acted not so much with the authority of a master, as with the zeal and diligence of a faithful servant. He charged indeed the presbyters with the performance of those duties, which the multiplicity of his engagements rendered impossible for him to fulfil, but had not the power to decide, or enact any thing, without the consent of the presbyters and people.^b"

But this appointment of a presbyter or bishop to the special inspection of each church, although it commenced in the first century, and must be deemed truly Apostolic,
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^a *Wesley's Eccl. Hist. Vol. 1. Page 58.*

^b *Mosheim's Eccl. Hist. Vol. 1. Page 76.*

yet it was an institution subsequent to that from whence the order of presbyters and bishops derived existence.

MosHEIM thus accounts for the origin of this presidency ; “ It is highly probable that the church of Jerusalem grown considerably numerous, and deprived of the ministry of the Apostles, who were gone to instruct the other nations, was the first which chose a president, or bishop, and it is no less probable that the other churches followed by degrees such a respectable example.^a” And from Mr. Wesley we learn as well as from Dr. Mosheim, that “ The church of Jerusalem was governed by the Apostles themselves, to whom both the Elders and Deacons were subject; and that this church was the model of all those that were afterwards erected during the first century.^b” Whilst from Acts xii. 17—xxi. 18, Gal. i. 9, and ii. 12 v, it is very apparent that the Apostle James,* in the absence of the other Apostles continued at Jerusalem in the capacity of overseer
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^a Mosheim's Eccl. Hist. Vol. 1, Page 76.

^b Wesley's Eccl. Hist. Vol. 1, Page 42.

* Mr. Wesley in his Note on Acts xii. 17, observes, that James was “ probably the chief overseer of that province, and of the church of Jerusalem in particular.” And commenting on Gal. ii. 9, he expressly asserts, that this Apostle “ Was Bishop of the church of Jerusalem.”

of that church : so that from these premises we may most reasonably infer, that on the departure of James from that church, it was induced by the express directions of that Apostle to choose an overseer, president or moderator therein, from amongst its presbyters ; and that the other churches were thereby constitutionally induced to imitate this example ; nor can any call in question the divine authority of this precedent who judiciously contemplate, Rev. i. 20, ii. 1, and ii. 12, &c.

As to the order of Bishops and Presbyters in the Apostolic age, Lord King well observes, that it “ was the same, for they had one and the same name.^a” And to the same purpose is the authority of Mosheim. “ The rulers of the church were called either Presbyters or Bishops, which two titles are in the New-Testament applied to the same order of men.^b” * From whence it appears that

^a King's Inquiry, Part 1, Page 64.

^b Eccl. Hist. Vol. 1, Page 72.

* Stackhouse, in his Body of Divinity, Vol. 3, Page 104 ; thus objects, “ That though the words Bishop and Presbyter, be sometimes used promiscuously, yet it will not therefore follow, that they are both of the same order. Because the Apostles in like manner, called themselves Presbyters, (1 Peter v. 1, and ii John 1 v,) but it must not thence be concluded that every

that the appellation Bishop, was not in the first century exclusively ascribed to the presiding or ruling Presbyter. And "The first author now extant who, even, distinctly mentions Bishops and Presbyters, is Ignatius, who lived in the beginning of the second century.^a" But still it is to be observed that though the order of these officers, was thus evangelically the same, yet their rank and authority were different. For as we have already noticed, a Bishop "presided in the council of Presbyters, and charged them with the performance of those duties which the multiplicity of his engagements rendered it impossible for him to fulfil."

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every Presbyter was an Apostle, &c." But this reasoning is evidently fallacious, because the words Apostles, and Presbyters, were never promiscuously used; for though the Apostles condescend in two instances, to call themselves Elders or Presbyters; yet Presbyters are never in a single instance called Apostles. And besides, as the objector's intentions were to have proved, that Presbyters had belonged to an order inferior to that of Bishops; so his argument is also otherwise unhappy: for it may be thus retorted, viz. That as the Apostles when called Presbyters, were of an order not inferior to that of Presbyters: so Presbyters when called Bishops, were of an order equal with that of Episcopacy."

^a King's Inquiry, Part 1, Page 77.

As to the Deacons, they were of an order inferior to that of Bishops and Presbyters. Their duty consisted more especially in that of serving tables ; (Acts, vi. 2,) and hence they not only served those of the poor, but also that of the Lord, for "the holy supper was distributed by them."^a

To this account of Bishops, Presbyters and Deacons having composed the officers which appertained to each christian assembly of the first age, we may add the bold assertion of that great antiquary the late and learned Dr. Stiles. "There is not an instance in the Apostolic age, of Bishop, Priests (a very improper name for Presbyters) and Deacons ; being stated officers of more than a single congregation. I risk this historic assertion, with the examination of the whole learned world ; although I well know, that like the evidences of revelation, it has been examined a thousand times with different judgments : and every congregation regularly and fully organized, had them as appears from St. Ignatius."

BUT evidence on this important head cannot be deficient, whilst we have the sacred writings to recur unto, and in which we discover those officers, as in real existence. "To all the saints in Christ Jesus, who are at Philippi, with the Bishops and Deacons" (Phil. i. 1.) The word Bishops here includes

^a *Wesley's Eccl. Hist. Vol. 1, Page 71.*

cludes all the Presbyters at Philippi, as well as the ruling Presbyters ; the names Bishops and Presbyters being promiscuously used in the first ages.^a

Was evidence to prove the actual existence of Presbyters in the Apostolic churches, deficient in the New Testament, we might avail ourselves of the joint authority of Dr. Doddridge and Mr. Wesley to substitute the term " Presbyters" for that of " Elders" in Acts xiv. 23 : but this is unnecessary, as 1 Timothy iv. 14, is irrefragably conclusive, " Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on the hands of the Presbytry."

NOR were the appellations Bishops, Presbyters and Deacons, the only ones which appertained to the officers of the Apostolic churches ; for in the holy scriptures we find others also occur, which deserve particular notice, viz. Pastors, Teachers, Helps, Elders, &c.

PASTORS. This Title occurs but once in the New Testament, (Ep. iv. 11.) although it frequently is mentioned in the Old. It is a phrase synonymous with that of shepherd, and appertained only to the officers called in the Revelation " Stars" and " Angels ;" (i. 20,) for " in each church, there was one Pastor, or ruling Minister, to whom all the rest were subordinate. This Pastor, Bishop,

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^a Wesley's Note on Phil. i. 1.

Overseer, had the peculiar care over that flock.^a

TEACHERS. This appellation implied no particular order, whose duty was only to teach, as distinct from that of Bishops and Presbyters, who were to be "apt to teach," (1 Tim. iii. 2,) and to "be able by sound doctrine to convince gainfayers." (Titus i. 9.) But as all church officers had not received gifts alike; (1 Cor. xii. 7, 8 and 29,) so Teachers may import those Bishops and Presbyters, who peculiarly excelling in knowledge and eloquence, were thereby most eminently endued with the talents requisite for teaching. Nor was teaching wholly confined to this order, as we find, Stephen, one of the seven Deacons, irresistible in eloquence. (Acts vii,) and Philip, another of that body, becoming even an Evangelist. (Acts viii. 5, 40; Acts xxi. 8.)

HELPS. This title, is mentioned in 1 Cor. x i. 28, where St. Paul enumerates gifts and officers conferred on the Church, as Apostles, Prophets, Teachers, Miracles, Helps, &c. Here it is observable that in the above list of officers, Deacons are omitted; and when we advert to their original appointment in Acts vi. it is manifest that they were designed to be *helpers* or aids to the Apostles, and Elders, in relieving them from the labors attendant on the immediate oversight of the concerns

^a Wesley's Notes on the Revelation.

concerns of the poor. But this appellation may perhaps also, as properly belong to the Deaconesses, for "In the Apostolic age, some grave and pious women were appointed Deaconesses in every Church ; their office it was, to visit the sick, the women in particular, and to minister to their necessities." This information we have from Mr. Wesley, in his note on Rom. xvi. 1. where he asserts that "Phebe, a servant of the Church of Cencherea," is in "the Greek a Deaconess of the Church of Cencherea ;" to which we shall add, the following brief quotation from his Ecclesiastical History. "Some, particularly the Eastern Churches, elected Deaconesses, and chose for that purpose, Matrons or Widows of eminent sanctity, who ministered to the necessities of the poor, and performed other offices that tended to the maintenance of order and decency in the church ^a"

ELDERS. Maclaine observes, that "the word *Elder* is taken from the Jewish institution (Num. xi. 16, 17.) and signifies rather the venerable prudence and wisdom of age, than age itself." It is an appellation common in the New Testament to Apostles, Pastors and Presbyters, (1 Peter v. 1, 2,) but it is most frequently applied to the two latter, (Acts xx. 17, 28 : Titus i. 5 : James v. 14, &c.)

RULING ELDERS, are made mention
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^a Vol. I, Page 58.

of in 1 Tim. v. 17. "Let the Elders that rule well, be accounted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine." From the distinction here made betwixt "ruling well" and "labouring in the word and doctrine," some have inferred that there were Elders whose office respected government only, whilst others have maintained that all Elders "laboured in word and doctrine," as well as partook of a share in the government of the church; and the latter have supported their opinion by Heb. xiii. 7, "Remember them who have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God." But this difficulty may be obviated, by remembering that the term *Elder*, is an appellation of Bishops and Presbyters; concerning whom, St. Paul observes, that they should be "apt to teach;" (1 Tim. 3 chap. 2 v.) and in Titus, that a Bishop or Presbyter should be one "Holding fast the faithful word, as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine, both to exhort and to convince gainsayers." From whence it is evident that the Bishop, Elder or Presbyter, should have been a person possessed of doctrinal talents; although it will not follow, that all should have possessed them in the same degree, nor is it probable, that they ever did; for the opposite is certain (1 Cor. xii. 4.) Whilst therefore, one, eloquent as an Apollos, was
 "apt,"

“ apt,” or expert at teaching, with all the energy and blandishments of rhetoric : others though less fluent in speech, yet equally correct in judgment, were able with “ found doctrine to exhort,” and by strength of reasoning “ to convince gainayers.” Nor is it unreasonable to conclude, that “ the Elders who ruled well, and who laboured in the word and doctrine,” were the Pastors and Teachers who stood in the first rank ; and who being eminently qualified, as well for teaching, as for ruling, gave themselves wholly thereunto, labouring in both, with all their might ; whilst the Elders, whose labours were more especially restricted to “ ruling well,” were the Presbyters, who were eminently qualified for that office, being men of calm minds, diligent to inspect, wise in council, and impartially firm to execute ; but who instead of incessantly labouring “ in the word and doctrine,” only “ exhorted and convinced gainayers,” as particular occasions required. And here it may not be unsuitable to close this head by observing, that whilst we thus, incontrovertibly discover Bishops, Presbyters and Deacons, holding each by divine appointment a place in the Apostolic churches, yet no trace whatsoever appears in them, (as the Cambridge platform well remarks) of “ Popes, Patriarchs, Cardinals, Arch Bishops, Arch Deacons, Officials, and Commissaries. These and the rest of
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that hierarchy, being mere inventions and appointments of men."

NUMBER. It has already been observed, that "in each church there was *one* Pastor or ruling Minister, who was styled the Bishop or Overseer of that flock." But there is no appearance whatsoever, that the primitive churches were restricted to a single Presbyter or Deacon; for Bishops (^a) and Deacons are mentioned as appertaining to one church, as in Phil. i. 1, and the plural of Elder, "a name common to Bishops and Presbyters,^b" frequently occurs as belonging to individual churches, Acts xi. 30—xiv. 46—xx. 17—xxi. 18,—Titus i. 5, and James v. 14. In the church of Antioch, there were four persons stiled "Prophets and Teachers," who, with prayer and the laying on of hands, separated Saul and Barnabas to promulgate the gospel amongst the Gentiles: and these four were probably the Presbyters of that community; for we learn, that at that early period, "Three or four Presbyters ruled each church in perfect harmony.^c"

THE advantages which resulted, from this Apostolic plurality of Presbyters, were evidently

^a "The word Bishop here, includes all the Presbyters at Philippi, the names Bishops and Presbyters being promiscuously used in the first ages."—Wesley's Notes.

^b King's Inquiry, Part 1, Page 65.

^c Mosheim's Eccl. Hist. Vol. 1, Page 75.

dently of very great importance : for as each christian assembly was thereby invested with competent powers of ordination within itself, its independence was of course secured in a high degree against the assumptions of other churches. And amongst these advantages, we are also to notice a considerable increase of ministerial talents and labours to each community ; nor should that of a Presbytery, be deemed the smallest, as it afforded a balance of departments in each church, and operated as a constitutional check, on the assembly of the people, or “ the multitude.” (Acts xxi. 18, 22.)

It must however be conceded, that in some instances a plurality of Presbyters, may have given occasion to a competition amongst them, unfavourable to the interests of religion ; but at the same time it should be remembered, that as one of that order, was evangelically constituted the Pastor or “ Angel,” and thereby constitutionally invested with an authority superior to that of his colleagues ; it of course powerfully tended to the preservation of subordination amongst the Presbyters, and of promotion of peace and unity throughout the whole community.

THE number of Deacons in each church, was arbitrary and uncertain, except that in no case they exceeded seven.^a

QUALIFICATIONS. As the great end,
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^a *King's Inquiry Part I, Page 81.*

sought in the institution of church officers was the “perfecting of the Saints, the work of the ministry, and the edifying of the body of Christ,” (Eph. iv. 12,) it therefore became indispensable, that those placed in that capacity, should have been men, apparently sound in the faith, experienced in the operations of grace, practiced in the duties of religion, and zealously attached to the interests of the gospel. And to confer which essential qualifications, was not so much the work of men as of him unto whom the church belonged. (Matt. ix. 37, 38—Luke x. 2.)

THE qualifications of Bishops, are particularly mentioned by St. Paul in 1 Tim. iii. 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, and in Titus i. 6, 7, 8 and 9 vs. where we learn, that an officer of that order “should not be given to wine or filthy lucre; not a brawler or covetous, not self-willed, nor soon angry, nor yet a novice; but should be blameless as the steward of God, the husband of one wife, ruling well his own house; and having his children in subjection, with all gravity; apt to teach a lover of good men, a lover of hospitality, sober, just, holy, temperate, &c.”

NOR should it be omitted to be here observed, that even in the age of miraculous endowment, provision was made for affording literary attainments to candidates for the ministry, for “Academies were erected
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in several large cities, in which persons of riper years, especially such as aspired to be public Teachers, were instructed in the different branches of learning. St. John erected a school of this kind at Ephesus, and one of the same nature was founded by Polycarp at Smyrna. But none of these were in greater repute, than that which was established at Alexandria, which was commonly called the catechetical school; and is generally supposed to have been erected by St. Mark.^a

THE qualifications of the Deacons are depicted in Acts vi. 3, and in 1 Tim. iii. 7 to 12, and we may in general observe of them, that whilst they imply all that is moral and gracious in the Bishop, they do not necessarily include the talents for teaching: But those of government, the Deacons were to possess, their office requiring such talents in their administrations to the poor.

ELECTION. But the servants of Christ, although duly qualified as above, and thereby furnished with credentials of a divine call to gospel labours; yet it remained dubious where they should have located, as well as uncertain whose ministers in particular they should have been. For in the first age of christianity, although each church had more than one located officer, yet none of that description ruled more than one

D church.

^a Wesley's Eccl. Hist. Vol. 1, Page 65.

church. It therefore became necessary, that the right or power of electing officers should have had existence somewhere, and been deposited in some hands or other : and from Mosheim we learn, that this invaluable privilege was vested in the people of each christian community ; for “ It was the assembly of the people which chose their own Rulers and Teachers, or received them by a free and authoritative consent, when recommended by others.”^a Clement, who was Bishop of Rome in the first century, informs of the Apostles, (in his celebrated Epistle to the Corinthians) that they “ ordained Bishops and Deacons with the consent of the whole church.”^b And in the year ninety-one of the christian era, Clement was himself thus elected ; for “ upon the death of Anacletus, Clement was unanimously chosen by the people and clergy of Rome to succeed him.”^c And this election of officers, by the free suffrages of the people fully accords with scripture precedents, established by the immediate and express appointment of the Apostles themselves. (Acts vi. 2, 3 and 5 vs. and Acts i. 15, 23.)

ORDINATION. To a divine call united with the electing voice of a particular church, there was added ordination ; before the man of God was constitutionally authorized

^a *Eccl. Hist. Vol. 1, Page 71.* ^b *King's Inquiry, Part 1, Page 49.* ^c *Bower's Hist. of the Popes, Page 15.*

thorized to take the oversight of the flock of God. (1 Peter v. 1, 2.) The blessed Redeemer himself, was ordained of the Father. (Acts xvii. 31.) As were the Twelve by Christ. (Mark iii. 14.) But ordination by imposition of hands and prayer. (Acts vi. 6.) appears to have been designed, as a standing ordinance or rite in the church ; for thereby Elders were constituted in all the churches ; (Acts xiv. 23.) and thus to constitute them in every city, was Titus left at Crete. (i. 5.)

By the “laying on of the hands of the Presbytery,” certain gifts were imparted to Timothy. (1 Tim. iv. 12—2 Tim. i. 6.) But gifts of a miraculous nature do not appear even in the Apostolic age, to have been generally conferred in that ceremony. Timothy was an evangelist ; (2 Tim. iv. 5.) and the gifts imparted to him, were “given by prophesy.” But in the ordination of Elders to a particular church, mention is nowhere made of any such prophesy, or gifts having been ever attendant thereupon. Ordination, therefore, as a permanent institution, may be considered as having implied Consecration, Induction, and Transfusion of office power. Consecration, or a separating of the Candidate from the multitude, and a solemn and formal dedication of him to God, and to the functions of religion, is consonant with the true genius of the gospel. Christ himself

self, having been singularly and most solemnly consecrated to his mediatorial labours. (Matt. iii. 16, 17.—Heb. vii. 28.) And Saul and Barnabas were, by the express appointment of the Holy Ghost, separated to spread amongst the Gentiles the glad tidings of salvation. (Acts xii. 2, 3.) Induction, or installation, being evidently implied in ordination, we shall pass on to Transfusion of office power. Office power, is here restricted to that of the administration of the sacraments, and of the laying on of hands, in ordination, &c. That these powers were imparted in ordination is evident, because in the Apostolic age and churches, no trace whatsoever appears of the laity, or of unordained persons having ever possessed them, whilst the reverse is undeniable, as to officers constituted such, by the solemnities of this sacred rite. It is however to be observed, that the Deacons, although ordained themselves, yet they partook not of the power to ordain others, nor yet to administer baptism,^a or consecrate the elements of the holy supper, to perform these being the prerogative of the Bishops and Presbyters alone; and to whom also appertained a discretionary power of withholding ordination, until full proof of due qualifications had appeared in the candidates. (1 Tim. v. 22.) As to the number of administrators

^a Philip baptized, Acts viii. 38 : But then he was an Evangelist, Acts xxi. 8.

tors requisite for the performance of ordination, it is not precisely mentioned : Lord King concludes, “that three were necessary ;^a” but considers more as not superfluous. (Acts xiii. 1, 2, 3.)

IV. LEGISLATURE. That the Apostolic Churches possessed Legislative powers, we learn from the Ecclesiastical Historian, who informs, that in the first century, “The churches were each governed by its own laws.^b” And this appears to have been their condition far into the next century ; “For during a great part of it, each christian assembly was a little state, governed by its own laws, approved by the society.^c” It is however to be particularly noticed, that these powers of ecclesiastical legislation were circumscribed within exceedingly narrow limits ; for the churches, being in subjection to Jesus Christ, as their supreme head and law-giver, received from him, and from his holy Apostles and Prophets, as duly empowered by him, each doctrine for belief, and each precept of a moral and indispenfibly binding nature. And whilst the writings of the Apostles and Evangelists exhibited the hallowed code, adequate to render the churches of Christ, as well as the man of God, perfect, unto every good word and work. (1 Tim. iii. 14, 5.—2 Tim. iii. 15, 16, 17,)

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they

^a *Inquiry* Part 1, Page 50. ^b *Wesley's Ecc. Hist.* Vol. 1, Page 59. *Ibid*, Page 93.

they denounced at the same time, all who should presume to add to divine precepts the commandments of men. (Matt. xv. 9.—Mark viii. 7, 8.) It therefore appertained not to the churches, to have dictated propositions for belief; nor yet to have invented rules of discipline obligatory on christians in common life; because “the rule and standard of what we are to believe, and of our conduct and actions, are the old and new Testament.^a” Nor can it be denied, but that it was so understood by the churches, even in the second century, when innovation had made rapid strides, and become hostile to gospel simplicity; for even then they “were all unanimous, in regarding the holy scriptures as the rule of faith and manners.^b” The churches therefore in their legislative capacity being thus restricted to the regulation of the prudential external circumstances of public worship, and of ritual institutions, resembled more chartered bodies than they did independent communities. But still, that legislative powers of a limited nature, were possessed by them, is obvious; because, as the performance of divine worship in a public manner, the observance of public fasting, as well as the celebration of the sacred supper, were duties which were all enjoined in the divine word, either by precept or example;

^a *Wesley's Eccl. Hist. Vol. 1, Page 63.*

^b *Ibid, Page 97.*

ample ; whilst the frequency, modes, and particular circumstances of them were in a great degree left undetermined. It therefore is inferable, that these prudential appendages of public worship, and of ritual institutions, were proper objects for Ecclesiastical Legislation. And hence it was, that “ the external forms of public worship, used in the times of old, must have been regulated according the character and manners of the different nations on which the light of the gospel arose.^a”

As to the primitive Ecclesiastical Legislatures themselves, it appears from King's Inquiry, &c. Part 1, Page 115, that each was composed of the whole of its respective church, or as Mosheim terms it, of the “ assembly of the people.” For it was that body that “ rejected or confirmed by its suffrages the laws that were proposed by the rulers to the assembly.^b” And he further well observes, that “ The people were undoubtedly the first in authority ; for the Apostles shewed by their own example, that nothing of moment was to be carried on, or determined without the consent of the assembly.^c” (Acts i. 15, vi. 3. xv. 4, 12, 22.)

V. JUDICIAL DEPARTMENT. Amongst “ the circumstances which contributed chiefly, to preserve sanctity in the christian church,

^a Wesley's Eccl. Hist. Vol. 1, Page 69.

^b Mosh. V. 1, Page 71. ^c Ibid, Pages 70, 71.

church, was the right of excluding from thence, such as had been guilty of enormous transgressions. This *right* was vested in the church, from the earliest period of its existence" (by Christ himself,) and "by the Apostles ; and was exercised by each christian assembly upon its respective members.^a" "The judges that composed this ecclesiastical court appear to have been the whole church, both clergy and laity. Not the Bishop, without the People, nor the People without the Bishop, but both conjunctly constituted that supreme Tribunal.^b" "But as the people were encumbered with business, and could not give their attendance, narrowly to search into every thing brought before them, therefore the Presbytery were appointed as a committee, to prepare matters for the whole court.^c" When after due investigation in this manner, "The rulers denounced the persons, whom they thought unworthy of church communion, and (the people approving) pronounced the decisive sentence.^d" But this judicatory, although thus composed of the whole community ; yet we are not to suppose the presence of every member, was absolutely necessary ; as a variety of circumstances might at times, have rendered such universal attendance

^a Wesley's Eccl. Hist. Vol. 1, Page 66.

^b King's Inquiry, Pages 112, 113. ^c Ibid, Page 114. ^d West. Ec. Hist. Vol. 1, Page 66.

ance utterly impossible. We may therefore reasonably conclude, that the same principles which have general operation amongst all popular bodies, governed also in this case, and consequently, that public and legal notice having been given to all the members, a majority of such a number present, as each church itself deemed a quorum, were competent to have decided all such business, as thus regularly come before them; for such a quorum was properly and truly the church, in its corporate capacity. As to this judicial authority, it properly originated from that fundamental statute, enacted by Christ himself in Matt. xviii. 15 16, 17, and 18. "If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go tell him his fault between thee and him alone; if he hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother; but if he will not hear thee, take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established; and if he shall neglect them, tell it unto the church; but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man, and a publican. Verily, I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven."

THE censures, or ecclesiastical penalties inflicted, were admonitions, suspensions, and excommunication. For "as the church, so
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her arms were spiritual : her thunderbolts, consisted in suspensions and excommunications, in ejecting forth her rotten and scandalous members.^a In some cases, the first step was a first and second admonition, (Titus iii. 10,) and which appears to have been accompanied by suspension. (1 Cor. v. 11.—2 Thes. iii. 6, 14, 15.) But the suspended and admonished brother not reforming, expulsion of course took place. This “however, was not irrevocable ; for such as gave undoubted signs of sincere repentance, were re-admitted into the church.^b” And this lenity was necessary, “lest such an one should have been swallowed up of over much sorrow.” (2 Cor. ii. 5 to 11.)

THE misdemeanors which rendered culprits obnoxious to the sentence of expulsion were various. For, from Matt. xviii. 17, it is obvious, that contumacy added to any other offence, was a crime, to which that particular penalty was annexed. Whilst from 1 Cor. v. 3, 4, 5 and 10 to 13 vs. it is equally apparent, that the incestuous and immoral professor, was, by apostolic injunction, marked out for correction of like magnitude. And involved in similar guilt and punishment was the schismatic, Rom. xvi. 17, and the heretic, Titus iii. 10.—“A man that obstinately persisted in contending about foolish

^a *King's Inquiry, Part 1, Ch. vii. Page 122.*

^b *Wesley's Eccl. Hist. Vol. 1, Page 66.*

foolish questions, and thereby occasioned strife and animosities, schisms and parties in the church.^a* Nor did those who subverted fundamental doctrines of religion, escape with impunity: for whosoever denied that Christ had come in the flesh, was antichrist. (2 John 7.) And if unlawful for christians to bid such God speed, or to have received them into their houses; then of course it was unconstitutional to have permitted them a place in the church of God. (2 John 10 11 vs.) The offences therefore cognizable as high misdemeanors, in the primitive ecclesiastical courts were stubbornness, immorality, schism, and a denial of the Lord that bought them; and a denial also of such other gospel doctrines, as might evangelically have been considered truly fundamental. (Rev. ii. 14, 15, 20.)

EXECUTIVE. The powers of this department were undeniably deposited in the hands of the Pastor, and in his absence in those of the Presbyters,^(b) from whence they were denominated rulers. (Heb. xiii. 7.) Nor could

^a Wesley's Notes on New-Testament.

* Some are indeed of opinion, that faults of this nature should be punished only by a kind of perpetual suspension, or formal and permanent withdraw of fellowship and communion from the culprit; but not by what is properly called excommunication.

^b King's Inquiry, Part 1, Page 115.

could this concentration of power in one, or in a few persons, have endangered the liberties of the community, as it tended to promote order, and greatly increased responsibility in the officers. (Heb. xiii. 17.)

THOSE powers may be considered as having implied a right, or authority, of convening the church, moderating in its meetings, pronouncing its admonitions, its sentences of suspension and excommunication, as well as its remission of censures to returning and accepted penitents; and of adjourning or dissolving its meetings, with the consent of the body: And likewise of enforcing divine laws on the remiss and unruly, by reproofs, rebuke, exhortation, admonition and entreaty. (1 Tim. v. 1, 2.—2 Tim. iv. 2, and Titus ii. 15). To the head of the executive, it should seem belonged also the right of receiving messages, or applications to the church; for the epistles of Christ in the Revelation, to the seven churches of Asia were each officially addressed to the Pastor or Angel, as head of the executive department; and to him, as particularly responsible for the ill or well being of the community to which he belonged.

It is however true, that the Apostolic epistles, were not thus particularly addressed, but then it is highly probable, that several of these epistles were written, before the election of a ruling Presbyter, had been instituted; and

and if others were written after that event had taken place, it is no less probable that such epistles were delivered by the Apostolic messengers to the different Pastors, and by them introduced into, and read in their respective churches.

BUT taking here a summary view of this form of government, thus established, we are in the first place presented with an identity, sameness, or striking uniformity of system, erected in each christian community of that luminous period. And with a sameness, or uniformity, so expressly asserted by the Ecclesiastical Historian, and explicitly, and strongly corroborated by multiplied evidence in the New-Testament, that sufficient ground hardly remains, on which to raise even a presumption to the contrary.*

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SECONDLY,

* *Bishop Coke, in his sermon preached at the ordination of Bishop Asbury, presumes, "that the churches in general, even before the death of St. John, were of the Episcopal order." But concludes "that in some instances Episcopacy was wholly omitted." But this attack on a uniformity of government in the churches of the first age, is evidently futile; for as the Bishop infers, this "omission of Episcopacy," from the epistle of Clement to the Corinthians, where it informs "that the church of Corinth was then governed by a College of Presbyters;" and from that of Polycarp to the church at Phillippi, in which*

SECONDLY, we perceive, that as the executive authority, was vested in the officers ; so on the other hand, the right of electing the officers appertained to the people. Thirdly, that after the “ officers as a Committee had prepared the business for the whole Court,” so the legislative powers and judicial authority were exercised by the whole community, officers and people together ; whereby mutual checks had operation upon each other ; because the more numerous voices of the people in suffrage, counterbalanced the superior eloquence and influence of the officers in deliberation. And Fourthly, as the powers of supreme legislation, or of dictating “ authoritative rules of faith and manners,” were not vested in either officers or people, nor yet in them conjointly ; but was exercised by Jesus Christ, and by his Apostles, independent

which we “ find that the christian Phillippians were then governed (also) by a College of Presbyters.” so it only will follow, that neither of these churches was governed by modern, or Diocesan, Episcopacy ; but it will by no means hold, that they were not governed by Apostolic Episcopacy, until such time as a Presbytery is proved to have been incompatible with Episcopacy of the latter kind ; and which indeed can never be performed, because, that Apostolic Bishops were Presbyters, and Presbyters were Apostolic Bishops, and they were such too even at Phillippi. (Phil. i. 1.)

independent of the suffrages of the churches, and once by the Apostles in conjunction with the church at Jerusalem (Acts xv.) but never by the churches, independent of, or separate from the Apostles. That therefore the divine code served as a supreme check on the different departments ; and consequently as the great palladium of order, and true liberty to the churches. From which general observations, it is clearly manifest, that the government of the first christian churches was of a mixed, and well balanced nature ; a theocracy, as implying the predominance of divine laws, republican in the election and powers of its officers, and a democracy in its legislative and judicial capacities.

AND it is of vast importance particularly to observe, that the church, under the modeling hand of the Apostles, assumed this free and popular form, not as gliding with the current of Rome's once free, and powerful republic ; but as nobly stemming the torrent of absolute dominion, under the despotism of a Tiberius, a Nero, and a Caligula. Circumstances, which in themselves alone must ever afford irrefragable proof, that the genius of the christian church, was not that of subjection to exterior controul, nor yet of bondage to its rulers ; but was on the contrary that of unalienable freedom, and of independent liberty.

HAVING

HAVING thus briefly enquired into the form of the government of the apostolic churches ; it may be of importance to close our researches on this head, by attempting a concise solution of the following, no less pertinent than interesting queries, viz. 1st. Was a church competent of itself to have displaced a Pastor from his office ? 2dly. Was it lawful for a Pastor to have departed from his flock ? 3dly. In whom was the power vested, of admitting members into each church ? And lastly, what causes are sufficient to justify members in departing from their respective churches, and becoming members of others, and what are the modes proper to be observed on such occasions ? But in order to resolve the two former queries, it becomes needful briefly to advert to the respective duties, incumbent on Pastor and People, towards each other.

As to those of the Pastor, they principally consisted in preaching the word, and feeding thereby the Flock with sound doctrine. In “ enforcing divine laws on the remiss and unruly, by reproofs, rebuke, exhortation, admonition, and entreaty.” In due administration of the sacraments to fit subjects ; in convening, and presiding in the meetings of the Church and Presbytery, and consulting with the Presbyters ; in faithfully and diligently discharging the various, and important duties of the executive, maintaining at
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the same time, an unblemished life and conversation, and “in all things shewing himself a pattern of good works.” (Titus ii. 7.)

THE duties of the people may be comprized under two heads; first, that of due attendance on the ministry of the Pastor, (Heb. x. 25,) as well as subjection to him, whilst acting uprightly and constitutionally in his official capacity. (1 Thes. v. 12, 13—Heb. xiii. 7, 17.) And secondly, that of having afforded him, a competent temporal support. (1 Cor. ix. 5, 7, 11, 13, 14—1 Tim. v. 17.) It being expedient, as well from nature, and reason, as from express and divine injunction, that them who preached the gospel should have lived of the gospel: in order, that being freed from the distraction of secular concerns, they might thereby wholly have given themselves to ministerial labours. (1 Tim. iv. 14.) And though the Bishop was not to be given to filthy lucre; yet it cannot be doubted, but that liberal maintenance was contemplated for him by St. Paul, when amongst other qualifications of this servant of Christ, and the church, he expressly noticed those of husband and parents, and required him to be given to hospitality. (1 Tim. iii. 2, 4—Titus i. 6, 8.)

THE duties incumbent on Pastor and People being therefore thus mutual and reciprocal, it should seem, that a failure on either part, if persisted in, must have dissolved

obligation on the other. For had the Pastor instead of preaching the unadulterated truths of the gospel, turned aside to vain jangling; (1 Tim. i. 6,) or spoiled his hearers with the idle speculations of a vain philosophy; (Col. ii. 8.) had he obstinately refused the due administration of the sacraments; had he through indolence or partiality, persisted to arrest the corrections of discipline from the disorderly or profane, or invaded, thro' lust of dominion, the rights of the people in their legislative, judicial, or elective departments; or had he become immoral in his conduct. It cannot be supposed, under such existing circumstances, that the covenant obligation of the people towards him remained unimpaired; but on the contrary, that the continued violation of it on his part, nullified it also on theirs.

AND in like manner, on the other hand, had the people generally and without cause, absented themselves from his ministry of the word; obstinately refused subjection to him in his official capacity; invaded his constitutional powers of office; or covetously, or carelessly withheld from him and family due subsistence; then covenant obligations being violated on the part of the People, they could have been no longer obligatory on the Pastor; it being subversive of all order, and consequently in the highest degree unreasonable and unjust, that either party should
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have remained bound, whilst the other had willfully and obstinately persisted in the breach of covenant obligations. But had a Pastor been in fault, and yet justified his conduct, or a People been culpable and still asserted themselves innocent; and had no Apostle been at hand, to have decided betwixt them, it is presumable that in such case, council would have been sought from sister churches; and especially, as "it was then customary in cases of difficulty to resort for advice, to such churches as had been founded immediately by the Apostles." But from the independent condition of the churches of that age, we may conclude, that the appellants would still have retained the authority of final decision. Whilst the consulted and advising churches might have withdrawn fellowship from that party which to them had appeared refractory; and have given countenance to the other, which they had considered as innocent and aggrieved.

As to the depository of power, for the admission of members into each church; it should seem to be the same as that for the expulsion of the refractory and profane. And therefore, as the church of Corinth in its corporate capacity, was evangelically the seat of that power, which expelled the incestuous person, (2 Cor. ii. 6,) so it was also, of that authority by which, the doors were apostolically opened for his re-admission,
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when afterwards he became truly penitent. (2 Cor. ii. 7, 8, 10.) And if the voice of the community was thus at once requisite and competent, to the expulsion, and re-admission of a member, why not also equally requisite, and competent to his admission in the first instance? We have indeed abundant reason to believe, that the first christian churches were erected by the authority of the Apostles and Evangelists alone: But when thus established, is it not highly reasonable and probable that the right of after admissions, was evangelically deposited in the hands of each community at large; as well as the authority of expulsion and restoration, and which latter we have seen above, to have been thus indubitably invested in each christian assembly?

But lastly, we are to consider the causes which justify members in departing from their respective churches, &c. And doubtless the causes which justify such separation, cannot be light or trivial; because "such departure tends to the dissolution of the body, as the pulling of stones and pieces of timber from the building, and of members from the natural body, tend to the destruction of the whole." The Cambridge Platform mentions the three following sufficient causes of such departure. 1st. When "a man cannot continue without partaking in sin," and which is the case in a church wherein the fundamental doctrines

doctrines of the gospel are evidently denied or subverted, (1 John ii. 18, 22, and 2 John 7,) and also in those, where though the form of godliness is possessed yet its power is denied. (2 Tim. iii. 5) 2dly, "Personal persecution, or general, wherein all are scattered." (Matt. x. 23. Acts viii. 1.) And 3dly, "The real want of competent subsistence." (1 Tim. v. 8.) But we may perhaps add another sufficient reason as having existence; namely, where a church tamely abandons its unalienable elective, legislative, or judicial rights and privileges; and still indolently refuses to resume them again. For in such case it is manifest, that a brother forfeits not his rights; and who shall impeach him for asserting his liberties, by withdrawing from such degraded community? (Gal. v. 1.)

It is however, highly expedient to use much deliberation, before such departure is determined on; least the seceding brother should unhappily rend himself from a christian community, through contentious pride, and in opposition to divine authority. For it is clearly manifest, that even in Sardis, the faithful were not authorized to have withdrawn from that degenerate community. And even where the evils are clearly of serious magnitude, yet still no small circumspection is requisite: for "by the hasty departure of sound members from a defective church, reformation is not promoted, but
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many times retarded, and corruption increased. Whereas, on the contrary, while sincere members, breathing after purity of reformation, abide together; they may, by the divine blessing, prevail much towards a reformation.^a

WHEN a member through persecution, or in order to more ample means of necessary subsistence, removes from one church to another; then letters of recommendation from the former to the latter, become expedient, as well for the accommodation of the removing member, as to preserve the churches from frauds and imposture. (Rom. xvi. 1—2 Cor. iii. 1.) And such letters may also be many times requisite; and for the same reasons, even where the removal is but transient.



PART

^a *Cambridge Platform, Page 13.*

PART THE SECOND.

The Apostolic System of Government, proved to be an Institution truly Divine ; and therefore one of indispensable Obligation. About the middle of the second Century commences its gradual Subversion. Priest Craft artfully now insinuates itself. Rapid Increase of grievous Innovations. Partial Renovation of Ecclesiastical Government at the Reformation. Lutheran Polity. System of Calvin. Of the established Church of England under Queen Elizabeth. An unhappy Mistake made by all these Reformers. Robert Brown's intemperate Efforts of Reformation, corrected by the more sagacious Zeal of John Robinson, the celebrated Founder of the Congregational Churches of New-England. State of the Controversy respecting the obligatory Force of the Apostolic Institution of Government, betwixt the Lutherans, and Methodists, on the one Hand ; and the Independent, Congregational, Antipædobaptist, or Baptist, Communities on the other Hand. Sundry Arguments offered in Support of the Opinion of the latter Communities, and sundry Objections of the former refuted. Summary of the foregoing Arguments. Deplorable Consequences of the Subversion

version of the Government of the first Christian Churches.

HAVING in the foregoing Part, pourtrayed that system of government instituted in the christian church, during the first century ; we are now to attempt, calmly and impartially to review briefly its origin ; to survey its primeval authority ; detect and scrutinize its subversion ; to notice various efforts made for its restoration. And lastly, to assert its present unimpaired obligation, as well as to defend it against various objections, &c. &c. And as the Polity in question secures invaluable rights and privileges to the people, whilst it invests church officers with important powers of office ; the subjects under discussion must, therefore, be viewed as highly interesting to christians of all ranks and denominations.

BUT in briefly reviewing the origin of this government, we must in the first place notice, that divine charter of Ecclesiastical *Liberty and Equality*, granted by Christ unto his church. “ Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them : and they that are great, exercise authority upon them ; but it shall not be so among you : but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister ; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant.”

servant." (Matt. xx. 25, 26, 27.) And which is further confirmed and explained in Matt. xxiii. 8, 9, 10.^a In the second place, we discover, emanating from the same divine source, a democratical tribunal instituted for each christian community. (Matt. xviii. 17.) The divine ratification of a *plurality* of *Presbyters*, becomes unquestionable in Acts xx. 28. Whilst the institution of a *ruling Presbyter*, *Pastor*, or *Angel*, in each church, is expressly confirmed by the Son of God, in Rev. i. 16, and ii. 1, &c. Nor is the limitation of church legislatures, fixed by an authority less express or divine. (Matt. xv. 9—Mark vii. 7.) And as to the other parts of this form of government, such as the popular election of its officers, their *ordination*, qualifications, powers of office, and independence of each community, &c. &c. that they were constructed, or put into operation by the Apostles themselves, is a truth evident and incontestable. (Acts i. 23,—vi.

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^a "The Jewish Rabbies were called Father and Master, by their several disciples, whom they required to believe implicitly what they affirmed, without asking any further reason; and to obey implicitly what they enjoined, without seeking further authority. Our Lord, therefore, by forbidding us either to give or receive the title of Rabbi, Master, or Father, forbids us either to receive such reverence, or pay any such to any but God." Wesley's Notes.

3—xiv. 23,—1 Tim. iii. 2 to 12,—1 Thes. v. 12, and Heb. xiii. 7, 17, &c. &c.)

BUT when it is considered, that an Apostle was “ a person honoured with a divine commission ; invested with the *power of making laws*, of controlling the wicked when expedient, and of working miracles when necessary,^a (Matt. xvi. 19—John xx. 22, 23 ;) that this authority was paramount to that of all the churches, (1 Cor. vii. 17 ;) his decisions in the spirit, and accompanied by the power of Christ, (1 Cor. v. 4 ;) and that the Apostles when assembled together in council, were instructed in an extraordinary manner by the Holy Ghost : (Acts xv. 28.) It will thence most clearly follow, that the Apostles were duly and divinely competent, to construct, and put into operation, the various parts of the foregoing system already ascribed to them ; and when the whole forementioned parts and circumstances of that system are taken into view, it will decisively follow, that, it was in its origin, truly and properly divine.^b

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^a *Wesley's Eccl. Hist. Vol. 1, Pages 55, 56.*

^b “ If it is true, that the Apostles acted by divine inspiration, and in conformity with the commands of their blessed Master, and this no christian can call in question ; that it follows, that the form of government which the primitive churches borrowed from that of Jerusalem, the
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But when we thus ascertain its divine origin, we also at the same time, incontrovertably establish its authority, as indispensable on all the churches of the first age. And an authority too which the conduct of the Apostles themselves loudly proclaimed; when not only at Jerusalem, but also in every other christian community throughout the world;* they either personally, or by the Evangelists, caused this system to be erected, and put into operation. (Titus i. 5.) And as the Apostles thus proclaimed the authoritative influence of this institution, so the churches of the first, and part of the second century, universally expressed their submission to its obligation, by their strict adherence to its form and arrangements as first established amongst them. But the authority of this Polity, may further

first christian assembly, established by the Apostles themselves, must be esteemed as of divine institution." Wesley's Eccl. Hist. Vol. 1, Page 56.

* It is here proper to observe, that by "every christian community," "all the churches," and the like expressions; is meant, all such churches of the first age as were capable of the complete observance of the Apostolic Polity, and which was evidently the case with the much greater part of them; and that in the others (which were but a very small proportion of the whole) this system was also erected, as far as each was capable of receiving it.

further be inferred, even from the conduct of its enemies, who instead of manfully repelling its assumptions if unconstitutional, verbally acknowledged its claims, whilst they secretly and insidiously undermined its distribution of powers to the officers, and of rights and privileges to the people. And a treachery too, which was practiced by those whose duty it was carefully to have guarded, and transmitted these powers and privileges inviolate to posterity. As to the heroes who thus first attacked this divine repository of Ecclesiastical rights and privileges, they made their appearance amongst the aspiring Bishops of the second age. And the theatre of these exploits, was the provincial councils, which had their origin in that era. For "these councils, of which we find not the smallest trace before the middle of this (11) century, changed the face of the church: for by them the privileges of the people were diminished, and the authority of the Bishops greatly augmented. At their first appearance in these councils, they acknowledged that they were no more than the delegates of their respective churches. But they imperceptibly extended the limits of their authority, and asserted that Christ had empowered them, to prescribe to his people, authoritative rules of faith and manners."^a

But

^a *Wesley's Eccl. Hist. Vol. 1, Page 94.*

But ambition, had thus no sooner prompted the rulers of the church to invade the rights and privileges of the people, than the subtilty of fraud became prolific, in devising further means to facilitate these insidious efforts of usurpation : For about this time, “ the christian Doctors had the good fortune to persuade the people, that the ministers of the christian church, succeeded to the character, rights, and privileges of the jewish priesthood ; and this persuasion was a new source, both of honours and profit to the sacred order. This notion was propagated with industry sometime after the reign of Adrian,^(a) when the second destruction of Jerusalem had extinguished, amongst the Jews, all hopes of seeing their government restored. And accordingly the Bishops considered themselves as invested with a rank and character similar to those of the high priest amongst the Jews, whilst the Presbyters represented the Priests,^(b) and the Deacons the Levites. The errors to which this notion gave rise were many ; and one of its immediate consequences, was the estab-

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lishing

^a *Adrian died in the Year 138, or 139, of the Christian Era.*

^b *From hence probably originated, the practice amongst some Christians, of consecrating Deacons into Priests by ordination ; and which has existence amongst some denominations even to the present time.*

lishing a greater difference between the Pastors and their Flocks, than the genius of the gospel seems to admit.^a"

PRIESTCRAFT having thus artfully insinuated itself into the church, and combining its efforts, and influence with those of ambition; it thereby soon became enabled to effect such further innovations, as not only prostrated the rights, liberties, and privileges of the people; but also as destroyed, through means of the provincial councils, that evangelical equality which distinguished the Pastors of the Apostolic age. For "another effect of these councils, was the gradual abolition of that perfect equality which reigned among all the Bishops in the primitive times. For decency (or rather ambition) required, that some one of the provincial Bishops met in council, should be invested with a superior degree of authority; and hence the rights of metropolitans derive their origin. In the meantime, the bounds of the church were enlarged; the custom of holding councils was followed wherever the gospel reached; and the universal church had the appearance of one vast republic, formed by a combination of a great number of little states. This occasioned the creation of a new order of ecclesiastics, who were appointed in different parts of the world, as heads of the church, to preserve the

^a Mosheim's Eccl. Hist. Vol. 1, Page 139.

the consistence of that immense body. Such was the office of the Patriarchs, among whom, at length ambition having arrived at its most insolent period, formed a new dignity, investing the Bishop of Rome, and his successors, with the authority of Prince of the Patriarchs.^a

WHEN the light, which arose in the sixteenth century had by its influence dispelled in no small degree, the reveries and corruptions of superstition, which so long had obscured the doctrines of religion; the advocates of reform, although all unanimous in reprobating papal supremacy, yet rested for the most part, in a very partial renovation of ecclesiastical government: For whilst the Lutheran Polity restored to the people some faint "marks of the authority in ecclesiastical affairs, exercised by them in the primitive times;^b" yet it permitted the continuance of the encroachments, first made, by Constantine the great; for "the supreme civil rulers of every Lutheran state, are clothed with supremacy in the church."^c And although, those of that denomination, concede, that modern Episcopacy is not of divine origin; yet they consider it as "highly useful and necessary:" and hence, in Sweden and Denmark, that "church is ruled by Bishops

^a *Wesley's Eccl. Hist. Vol. 1, Page 94.*

^b *Ibid, Vol. 3, Page 198.*

^c *Ibid.*

Bishops and superintendents, under the inspection and authority of the sovereign.^a

THE system of Calvin repelled indeed in a very great measure, the usurpations of the civil magistrate; and restored to the Pastors Apostolic equality, although it divested them of the scriptural appellation, Bishops. But it also, grievously violated the rights and privileges of the people; in its institution of Consistories, Synods, and General Assemblies; and which it has invested with the supreme ecclesiastical authority.

THE government of the church, established in England under Queen Elizabeth, although it differed from *modern presbyterianism* on the one hand, and from Lutheranism on the other; yet it resembled more the latter than the former; as it blended civil with ecclesiastical government, by investing *modern episcopacy* with supreme ecclesiastical power, "under the inspection and control of the sovereign."

THAT the founders of these different systems kept in view, as the best models for their imitation, the ecclesiastical institutions of antiquity, is undeniable; because as the Lutheran and Presbyterian Politics, loudly proclaim it; so the "court reformers," under Queen Elizabeth, professedly "considered as the best, that form of ecclesiastical government, which took place during the first three

^a *Wesley's Eccl. Hist. Vol. 3, Page 198.*

centuries.^a But from our former researches, it is incontestible, that within the first three centuries, there were in the christian church, two distinct systems of ecclesiastical government. The first incontrovertably of divine origin ; and the second, that, which commencing through means of the provincial councils about the middle of the second century, was afterwards enabled, through the fraudulent efforts of usurpation, gradually to erect its metropolitan and patriarchal dignities, on the ruins of Apostolic “ freedom and liberty.” And on this very rock it was, that those illustrious champions of reform, and their immediate followers were so unhappily shipwrecked, in their attempts to restore church government to its pristine glory. They mistook, they confounded together, the fair stones, and goodly pillars of the Apostolic edifice, with the rubbish, and mishapen projections of fraudulent device.

ROBERT BROWN, a native of Northampton, in England, perceiving this mistake, and wishing to rectify it, “ was for forming the whole body of the faithful into separate congregations, similar to those established by the Apostles in the first century. And pronouncing each independent, to erect therein a democratical form of government.” But as his zeal was intemperate, his errors not a few, and the persecutions which he met with
severe ;

^a *Wesley's Eccl. Hist. Vol. 3, Page 251.*

severe; he became soon shaken in mind, and was induced, abruptly to abandon a cause, so beset with dangers and difficulty. But to advocate with superior ability, moderation, and success, the restoration of Apostolic government to the churches, was an honor reserved for that venerable man John Robinson, "a divine of Norfolk, in Great-Britain," Pastor "of a congregation of Brownists in Leyden, in Holland," and who died, about the year 1626, at Leyden, in that country, when preparing to emigrate to Plymouth in New-England. "This well meaning man, perceiving the defects that reigned in the discipline of Brown, and in the temper of his followers; employed his zeal and diligence in correcting them, and in modelling anew the society, in such a manner as to render it less liable to the just censure of those true christians, who looked upon charity as the end of the commandment.^a" The independent and congregational churches, therefore, who adopted the sentiments of this praise worthy reformer, did not like the followers of "Brown, pour forth bitter invective against the churches, that were governed by rules different from theirs; nor pronounce them on that account unworthy of the christian name.^b"

But the Methodists who arose before the middle

^a *Wesley's Eccl. Hist. Vol. 4, Page 108.*

^b *Ibid.*

middle of the present century, and whose indefatigable efforts, and rapid augmentation of numbers, threatened for a time, the dissolution of some other societies, seem not to have advocated a re-establishment of the Apostolic Ecclesiastical system. For during the life of their celebrated founder, they for the most part remained in Great-Britain, and Ireland, members of the established churches in them countries. And although under his direction, they assumed an independent, and Episcopal form in these states; yet (as will hereafter appear more fully) they copied not after the divine model; but considered themselves as authorized to devise and establish a novel institution. And this licence they seem to have taken from the Lutheran sentiment, which maintains that, "different forms of ecclesiastical polity, may be adopted, because the divine law is silent upon this head." But reviewing here the ecclesiastical systems and sentiments of these communities, we may in the first place notice the Presbyterians, and British Episcopalians, maintaining the divine right of institutions, resembling in but a small degree, that established by the Apostles. We next discover the Independent and Congregational, and we may add many respectable Baptist, or Antipædobaptist, communities; each zealous for the erection of the polity of the first century; and all asserting its obligation

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as indispensable, over the christian assemblies of all succeeding generations.* And lastly, we perceive the Lutherans and Methodists claiming a right to institute such ecclesiastical systems as they may each judge to be expedient, although greatly different from that of the Apostles. But as the two latter communities concede the Apostolic system to have been of divine origin ; so those of the Independent, Congregational, and Anti-pædobaptist denominations, acknowledge that this polity, as it respects a plurality of Elders in each church, in the present divided, and subdivided state of the world, is not now always practicable in each christian assembly. And hence the identical point disputed, betwixt the Lutherans and Methodists on the one hand, and the Independents, &c. on the other, may be resolved into the two following propositions (maintained in the negative by the two former communities, and in the affirmative by the three latter) viz. first, that

* *It must indeed be acknowledged, that but few of these communities, appear ever duly to have considered, the nature or importance of regular Presbyteries ; and that those, which paid some attention to this subject, never perhaps sufficiently adverted to the due subordination of the Elders, or Presbyters ; to one of that body, presiding over his colleagues (for the sake of order and responsibility) as was instituted in the latter part of the Apostolic age.*

that the system of ecclesiastical government, devised and established by the Apostles in the churches erected by them, in the first century, is still indispensably obligatory on every christian church, wherein it may be carried fully into effect, according to the true intention of it. And, secondly, that even where the establishment of a plurality of Elders, or Presbyters, is impracticable, yet, that this partial inability, does not destroy the obligatory force of the residue of that divine system, as it respects such particular community.

BUT as it is here designed, to take the affirmative side of the question; it will be of importance to lay down the following general principle, and one which perhaps may justly be considered as little short of an axiom in divinity: viz. that wherever a divine institution has once been obligatory, has never been repealed, and is still practicable, according to the true intention of it, that of course such institution is still obligatory. And applying this incontestable principle to the former of the above propositions; we assert, that the system of ecclesiastical government devised and established by the Apostles, &c. is still indispensably obligatory on every christian church wherein it may be carried fully into effect, &c. Because that in such case, it is a divine institution which has been once obligatory, which has never been re-

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pealed, and which is still practicable according to the true intention of it. For all divine institutions which were once obligatory, which never have been repealed, and which are still practicable, according to their true intention, are of course still indispensably obligatory.

BUT we are now to prove, or rather shew explicitly, that this predicated agreement is true, as it respects the several parts of the foregoing premised general principle, and which, if once accomplished, will render the conclusion irrefragable : or to express it otherwise, this argument will be rendered conclusive, by making to appear ; first, that the ecclesiastical system established by the Apostles was a divine institution. Secondly, that the observance of this institution, was once obligatory on all such christian communities as it might afterwards become practicable to establish it fully in, according to its true intention.* And lastly, by shewing that this
obligatory

** It must be obvious to the reader, that this practicability, in large christian communities, is here taken for granted ; and that it is so taken, not merely because it does not appear ever to have been disputed ; but because it cannot be called in question without evident absurdity. For as it is undeniable that such communities are each competent to the erection of this system, if but disposed thereto ; so it is likewise evident, that*

obligatory influence, has never been repealed. But as the divine institution of the system in question, has been already sufficiently proved ; we therefore pass on, to consider in the second place, its proposed obligatory influence. And here we are likewise, in part again anticipated ; as we have before explicitly seen the observance of this polity, to have been indispensable, on all the christian churches of the first century. And hence, in order truly to ascertain the identical point of influence here sought ; more is not now requisite, than merely to form a just idea of the relation, in which those churches
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that the true end, or intention of it was, through means of well balanced departments, and the faithful labors of the officers, to preserve the rights, privileges and authority of each church, in order to the promotion of its piety and knowledge : and which ends, wherever this system becomes now duly established, are as attainable thereby, as they were through the same means in the first century ; unless like causes will cease to produce like effects. Nor will it be unsuitable to remark here, that the observance of an unrepealed divine institution, is not binding, even though it should be practicable, unless it is also practicable according to its true intention. And which is manifestly the case, with the Apostolic injunction, which required the anointing of the sick with oil, &c. &c. (Jas. v. 14, 15.)

of the first century, stood, to all others of the like description which have succeeded them. That the christian churches of one age, or generation, are each but several parts of one great whole, is incontestable. And that the whole of them taken together into one view, are to all the others of former and succeeding ages, only what one of them is to the rest of the same age, is no less evident, because it is obvious and certain, that no one church is the whole visible church of that age in which it may subsist; and that all the true and visible churches of one generation, although they contain, or form the then visible militant body of christians; yet this body is still but a single part of a much greater body, or community; which has subsisted in former, and which shall still continue to subsist through succeeding generations. (Ep. iv. 4, 5, 6.) From which view of the subject, and which is undeniably a just one, we evidently perceive such a sameness of the body corporate, mystical and ecclesiastical, and such an identity of interests and obligation, subsisting necessarily throughout the whole succession, as clearly involves proof of the very point of obligation in question. As it will therefrom, most certainly follow, that any divine institution once obligatory on the churches of the first generation, must whilst unrepealed, and practicable according to their true intention, have extended a like constitutional

tional obligation to the others of all succeeding ages in their turn. It remains therefore now only to shew, that this institution has not been repealed ; nor is this difficult, because, as on the one hand there is no proof of such repeal ; so on the other, there is some evidence that such an event has never taken place. And how glaring is this deficiency of proof, when not a single ray, or trace to the contrary, appears either in the New-Testament, or any where else out of it. And yet, when the Mosaic Polity was set aside, how evident was its repeal ; Baptism and the Lord's Supper proclaimed a new dispensation, which the Holy Ghost at Pentecost, divinely ratified. And the Apostles in council, influenced by the divine spirit, bore testimony to the annulling of the former institution. (Acts xv. 7 to 29.) Nor could this evidence of repeal, have been at all dispensed with ; because that without it the authority of the former dispensation would have retained its full force : and from hence it will follow, that the total want of such proof, as it respects the Apostolic institution, is a most conclusive argument of its unrepealed, unimpaired influence wherever truly practicable. As to the positive evidence, which we have that no such repeal has taken place ; it is principally derived first, from the general nature of the divine dispensations, and secondly, from the particular institutions, which exist

under the gospel œconomy. In respect to the former, we observe three dispensations, the Patriarchal, Mosaic, and the Gospel. Under the first, the form of the visible church was domestic, under the second it was national, and under the last congregational. And as the form of the visible church remained unrepealed, and uniform, throughout the whole of each of the two first dispensations; so we have therefrom the evidence of analogy, to render the same unrepealed uniformity probable, as it respects the congregational form and government of the visible church under the latter dispensation. And this evidence becomes still stronger, when in the second place we advert to the other institutions of the gospel œconomy itself, viz. Baptism, and the Lord's Supper, whose unrepealed influence are admitted by all who acknowledge the divine authority of the New-Testament. For if these divine institutions are permanent under the gospel, why not also the divine institution of church government under the same dispensation? And especially, when the establishment of this government took place under Apostolic injunction. (Titus i. 5.) When "no christian can call in question, that the Apostles (in so doing) acted by divine inspiration, and in conformity with the commands of their blessed Master.^a" And when, what Christ thus commanded the Apostles to teach the nations

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^a Wesley's Eccl. Hist. Vol. 1, Page 56.

to observe, was to be so observed "even to the end of the world." (Matt. xxviii. 20.)

HAVING therefore thus established the former proposition, which asserts, "That the system of Ecclesiastical government established by the Apostles in the church of Jerusalem, &c. &c. is still indispensably obligatory on every christian church, wherein it may be carried fully into effect according to the true intention of it;" we are now to proceed and prove the latter, which maintains, "that even where the establishment of a plurality of Elders or Presbyters is impracticable, yet that this partial inability does not destroy the obligatory force of the residue of that divine system, as it respects such particular community." But in order to prevent mistakes, it will be needful here to observe, that this inability is often neither necessary nor innocent, but on the contrary is many times willful and criminal; for it is evident that no small number of churches are thus impotent, in consequence of grievous divisions, and of unnecessary separations; even from having "striven about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers," (2 Tim. ii. 14,) and from having forgotten that "the end of the commandment is charity," are thereby "turned aside unto vain jangling." (1 Tim. i. 5, 6.) And is it not from this very cause, that we behold so many inconsiderable towns and villages, which have each nominally their plurality

plurality of christian societies; whilst the whole, in either of those towns or villages, would not perhaps have been more than competent to the formation of one community therein duly and apostolically organized: nor would this mutilated condition have been their case, had they but imitated "the beautiful simplicity of the first ages, when the great study of those who embraced the gospel was rather to express its divine influence in their dispositions and actions, than to examine its doctrines with curiosity."^a And from what has been said, is it not obvious, that many of these divided, and subdivided churches, instead of being freed by their inability, from the authority of Apostolic institutions, are thereby rather laid under new obligations? Yes, it is manifest, that repentance, and mutual forgiveness is now incumbent on them; and that it behoves them, laying aside invidious sectarian appellations, to re-unite as christians, and as such, to walk in the faithful observance of the Apostolic ordinances. And there is danger also, of being misled by this inability, in supposing it to be more general than it really is. First, with respect to the qualifications of the Presbyters as Teachers, and secondly, as to the funds competent for their support. For although all Bishops, Elders or Presbyters, should be "apt," or expert, in teaching, yet
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^a Wesley's Eccl. Hist. Vol. 1, Page 64.

it does not follow, that they should be all thus “apt” or qualified in the same degree. That the presiding Minister, or Pastor, should possess talents for “ruling well,” and for “laboring in word and doctrine,” is admitted. But if the others are able “to exhort with sound doctrine,” and by argument “to convince gainsayers” they are, as to teaching qualifications, evangelically fitted for that office.* (Titus i. 9) And to this agrees the account given by the Ecclesiastical Historian, of the assemblies of the first christians, where the reading of the holy scriptures “was followed by a brief exhortation to the people, in which art gave place to the natural expression of zeal and charity.^a”

AND as to the establishment of funds competent for the support of a plurality of Elders, it is not perhaps attended with such difficulties as might be supposed on the first view of the subject. For although the Pastors, who gave themselves wholly to ministerial labors, were in consequence supported altogether by their Flocks; yet such ample maintenance does not appear to have been always bestowed on the other Elders; for St. Paul makes an express distinction, “let the Elders that rule well, be counted worthy of

* See this more fully explained in the first part, under the head of Ruling Elders.

^a Wesley's Eccl. Hist. Vol. 1, Page 70.

of double honor, (that is of more abundant temporal support) especially they who labor in the word and doctrine." (1 Tim. v. 17.)

BUT in order to prove the foregoing inability, where prevalent, not to be destructive of the residue of the Apostolic system; little more is requisite than a bare survey of this practicable part. And separating the the Presbytery from the establishments of this polity, we behold remaining a Pastor, invested with executive powers, and authorized to moderate in the meetings of the church, to administer the sacraments, &c. Deacons duly consecrated for the service of the tables of the poor, and for that of the Lord, and the people possessing elective authority, and when convened in assembly, constituting at once the ecclesiastical legislature, and supreme court of judicature. And from this concise but just view of the subject, is it not manifest, that a church by being unable to furnish itself with more than one Elder, yet forfeits thereby, no part or degree of its elective authority? And as it is unnecessary here to attempt proving what nobody can deny, it may again be asked, why this inability should render a church inadequate to the enacting of such laws as are requisite "for the regulation of the external circumstances of public worship, &c." And if thus competent to the exercise of legislative authority, why not also to the rejection of
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of a rotten and incorrigible member from its communion? And if the community, although destitute of a Presbytery, is still possessed of elective, legislative, and judicial authority, will it not follow that its officers, the Pastor and Deacons, are also duly invested with their official powers? And as the foregoing queries cannot be replied to in the negative, without first asserting, that a church which is incompetent to the establishment of a presbytery, is also incompetent to the establishment of public worship, to the due administration of the sacraments, and expulsion of disorderly members: But as this is an assertion which the hardiest will not dare to attempt; it will follow, that this residue of the Apostolic system, which confers these powers and privileges on a church, thus inadequate to the establishment of a Presbytery, is still in force, and obligatory on such church: and of course, the proof of that proposition is completely effected, which maintains, "that where the establishment of a plurality of Presbyters is impracticable, yet that this partial inability does not destroy the obligatory force of the residue of the Apostolic ecclesiastical system, as it respects such particular community."

NOR can it be deemed a digression to close this head, by observing that though in large communities the want of a Presbytery must be viewed as a serious evil from its tendency

cy to derange the divine balance of departments ; yet that in smaller ones it cannot be considered as equally important ; not merely because on many other accounts a plurality of Elders is less necessary in the latter, than in the former ; but also, because that in one, the balance of departments is perhaps much less difficult to be maintained, than in the other : nor does it appear improbable that this equilibrium, might in a considerable degree be restored in such communities, by following the example of those who finding themselves incompetent to the establishment of regular Presbyteries, have chosen in each, wise and experienced Brethren, and appointed them as a permanent committee, to aid the Pastor in council, and in “ digesting business for the assembly of the people.”

HAVING thus proved the divine permanence of the Apostolic ecclesiastical system ; we are in the next place to defend it against the cavils of objectors. Nor are the opponents of this permanence, mean or contemptible, but of distinguished rank and character : for it has been assailed by some divines of the established church of England, who in conjunction with the doctors of the reformed churches on the continent of Europe, laid down, in the sixteenth century, the following hostile maxim : viz. “ That Jesus Christ has left upon record no express injunctions

injunctions with respect to the external form of government, that is to be observed in his church; and consequently, that *every nation* hath a right to establish such a form as seemeth conducive to the interests, and suitable to the peculiar state, circumstances, and exigencies of the community.^a But this maxim, although in a great degree rendered futile, by its adoption of that so generally, and justly exploded an idea, of a national church; yet to place it in its strongest point of view, we shall consider it as seconded, and corrected by the joint assertions and inferences of Mosheim and Wesley themselves, who maintained that “neither Christ himself, nor his holy Apostles have commanded any thing clearly or expressly concerning the external form of the church, and the precise method, according to which it should be governed;” and thence proceed; “From this we may infer, that the regulation of this, was in some measure to be accommodated to the time, and left to the prudence of the chief Rulers of the church.^b” And here combining these objections, they may be resolved into the following propositions: first, “that neither Christ, nor his Apostles have commanded any thing clearly, or expressly concerning the precise method according to which his church should be governed.”

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Secondly,

^a *Wesley's Eccl. Hist. Vol. 3, Page 262.*

^b *Ibid, Vol. 1, Page 56.*

Secondly, "that therefore its government, was in some measure to be accommodated to the time, circumstances, exigencies, &c. of the church itself." And thirdly, "that of course, this accommodation or change of ecclesiastical government was to be left to the chief Rulers of the church." But if we should here admit the premises, or former proposition even in its fullest extent, still the inferences will not hold, whilst it is admitted, or can be proved that a system of government was devised by the Apostles, and by them uniformly established in each christian church of the first age. Because it is then an argument which can, with much greater force, be retorted thus, viz. That this system when once thus devised and put into operation, needs no clear or express command to confer on it an abiding authority, because it is in itself of course, permanently authoritative towards each christian community in which it is practicable according to its true intention; unless divine and Apostolic authority, to alter or annul it, as clear and express as that by which it was at first established, can some where be discovered. But as we have seen the existence and operation of this system sufficiently proved; and as no such authority to alter or annul, can any where be discovered or produced, it of course follows, that this system is unchangeably and perpetually obligatory on each christian community

community wherein fully practicable, &c. And therefore it follows, that it is not left to the chief Rulers of the church, nor to any other persons to alter or accommodate it, to any circumstances or exigencies whatsoever.

BUT further, when it is remembered, how explicitly and particularly a popular Tribunal was by the express command of Christ himself instituted in Matt. xvii. 15, 16, 17, 18, as a precise part of that system by which his church should be governed; then it is evident “that something is clearly and expressly commanded by Christ, concerning at least a part of the precise method according to which his church should be governed;” and is thereby also manifest, that the force of the objection contained in the first proposition, is at least in some degree obviated. But preparatory to the deducement of an argument from the express commands of Christ to the churches in the Revelation, in order more fully to remove this objection, it may be proper to premise the following admirable note of Mr. Wesley’s, concerning the relative, and representative, situation of them celebrated communities. “The seven churches with their Angels, *represent the whole christian church*, dispersed throughout the whole world, not as it subsists in one age after another, *but in every age*. This, a point of deep importance, and always necessary to be

be remembered, that these seven churches are as it were a sample of the whole church of Christ, as it was then, as it is now, and as it will be in all ages." And whoever but duly contemplates the solemn weight of that sevenfold divine command, "he that hath an ear let him hear what the spirit saith unto the churches," must readily acknowledge this representative situation of those churches. We now therefore proceed to attempt, candidly to consider, Rev. ii. 24, 25,—iii. 3, and iii. 11. In the former of which passages Christ thus addresses the Pastor of Thyatira, and those of his Flock, who had resisted the seductions of a Jezabel, "I will put upon you none other burthen. But that which you have already, hold fast till I come." In the next, he thus commands the church of Sardis, "Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast." And in the last place, he thus enjoins on the Philadelphians through their Angel, "Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." But what was it, which those churches had "received," of which they were thus possessed, and which they were so expressly commanded to hold fast? They undoubtedly had "received," and were repossessed of grace (although in different degrees,) which gently bowed their necks and hearts to the "light burden, and easy yoke" of the Redeemer. (Matt. xi. 29, 30.) They manifestly had "heard,"
"received,"

“received,” and were in possession of the blessed doctrines, and ordinances of the gospel. And as Mr. Wesley, and Dr. Mosheim inform us, they also indisputably had “received” and were in possession of an Ecclesiastical form of government, evangelically borrowed from that divine system, established by the Apostles at Jerusalem, (*a*) when “acting under the influence of divine inspiration, in conformity with the commands of their blessed Master.^b” (Matt. xxviii. 20.) And hence in “holding” each of these “fast,” they were but “keeping Christ’s works unto the end.” (Rev. ii. 26.) And this they were enjoined to do personally till “his coming” at death; and in their successors, till his “coming” at the end of the world in Judgment. And that this holding fast of the rights, powers and arrangements of the Apostolic Polity, was not a solitary duty incumbent on these churches alone; but was a general and common duty equally obligatory on the residue of the seven, and consequently upon all others of every age; is strikingly manifest, from the severity of divine censure to that of Pergamus for being remiss in the exercise of Ecclesiastical authority. (Rev. ii. 14, 15, 16.) And from the approbating voice of the Son of God to that of Ephesus for its vigilant preservation

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^a Wesley’s Eccl. Hist. Vol. 1, Page 42.

^b Ibid, Page 56.

of its rights in its detection of the assumptions of false Apostles, and for its faithful exercise of Ecclesiastical power, in authoritatively severing the wicked from the congregation of the faithful. (Rev. ii. 2.)

BUT when we thus contemplate the churches of Thyatira, Sardis and Philadelphia as possessed in common with all the churches of that age, of a compleat system of Ecclesiastical government; and behold them "clearly and expressly commanded" to hold fast not merely divine grace and the doctrines and ordinances of the gospel, but also as expressly and clearly commanded to hold fast this Ecclesiastical system until Christ's coming, (at death, and judgment;) and when we perceive as above, that this system, was equally influential also, on that of Ephesus, Pergamus, Smyrna, and Laodicea, in their representative capacities, and of course on all the others of that and every other age. It will manifestly follow, "that Christ has clearly and expressly commanded the perpetual observance of the precise method according to which his church should be governed." And consequently, the former of the above propositions which maintains the contrary utterly falls to the ground; and as it is the premises, from whence the others are deduced, they of course must fall together with it.

BUT if the foregoing argument was even destitute

destitute of that conclusive authority, which it so evidently possesses; still the objectors inferences would not follow from their premises. Unless we also, were to abandon the observance of the christian sabbath, female participation of the sacred supper, and the baptism of infants, to the chief Rulers of the church to mutilate, change, or accommodate to such circumstances as their discretion might direct. For it is most manifest, that abundantly more is taught and exhibited in the divine word, by precept, instruction, and authoritative example concerning Ecclesiastical government, than there is thus taught, or exhibited therein, relative to the christian sabbath, female participation of the Eucharist, or infant baptism. And this argument alone is decisive with all who hold to the necessity of the observance of these institutions, as taught by the Apostles to the christians of the first age.*

BUT

* *Should it be objected, that the case of infant baptism, of the observance of the christian sabbath, &c. is different from that of the Apostolic Polity; because whilst the latter institution can be traced to have existed in the church, only until the second or third centuries; yet each of the former, has regularly, and evidently continued to be observed, from the days of the Apostles, down to the present time; and consequently that the latter, are more obligatory*

BUT the second proposition, although it will not hold, as an inference from the first; yet as it involves the idea, of necessary mutation in Ecclesiastical government; in order to accommodate it, to "time, circumstances, &c." it must therefore be deserving of a more particular consideration. That Ecclesiastical government is not necessarily mutable, in order to its accommodation to civil establishments of government, may be well inferred, from an important and striking circumstance already taken notice of, viz. that the christian church, under the modeling hand of the Apostles, assumed a free and popular form; not as gliding with the current of Rome's once free and powerful Republic, but as nobly stemming the torrent under the despotism of a Tiberius, a Nero and a Caligula. And that it is equally immutable as
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ry than the former, on the churches of this, and future ages. It may in such case be replied, that as truth and error, right and wrong, are such in their own natures, wholly independent of any regard whatsoever to the time which they may have existed: so the above institutions, are neither the better nor the worse, nor yet more or less authoritative for having existed one, two, ten, or seventeen centuries, but are each authoritative, and obligatory on the churches, because instituted by Christ or his Apostles, who were divinely commissioned for that purpose.

it respects the characters, customs and manners of those who become the subjects of it, will be no less apparent, when it is considered, how wide the Apostles and Evangelists extended the limits of the christian church, and consequently how diversified in all these respects were the numerous profelytes, amongst whom they established this common system. "For the Apostles having finished their work at Jerusalem, travelled over a great part of the known world, and in a short time planted a vast number of churches among the Gentiles. Several of these are mentioned in the sacred writings; though these are but a small part of the churches, which were founded either by the Apostles themselves, or by their disciples under their immediate direction." And it should never be forgotten, that whilst a sameness of government was every where established, without respect to the antecedent characters, customs or manners of the subjects, who yielded to its authority; yet that it was far otherwise, as to ritual institutions, and the external forms of public worship; for "we learn from authentic records, that the christian worship was from the beginning, celebrated in a different manner in different places, and that no doubt, by the orders, or at least with the approbation of the Apostles. In those early times it was both wise and necessary to shew
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in the establishment of outward forms of worship, some indulgence to the ancient manners, and laws of the respective nations to whom the gospel was preached.^a “ In a word the external forms of worship used in the times of old, must have been regulated according to the character and manners of the different nations on which the light of the gospel arose.^b” But notwithstanding the great force of argument evidently contained in the foregoing observations; it will not be improper to remark further, that although each form of civil government is on due examination, found to need frequent reforms, or alterations: yet no argument can be deduced therefrom, to support mutation in the Apostolic Ecclesiastical system; because whilst the former are devised only by the judgments of fallible men, and consequently are imperfect; the latter has been instituted by “ Apostles who acted by divine inspiration, and in conformity with the commands of their blessed Master.^c” And therefore the foundation which these “ wise master builders” (1 Cor. iii. 10) laid in the church, may be considered as perfect and immovable, and the divine superstructure which they erected thereon, must be viewed as the hallowed and perpetual repository, of Ecclesiastical rights, powers, privileges, and arrangements. And
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^a *Wesley's Eccl. Hist.* Vol. 1, Page 68.

^b *Ibid*, Page 69. ^c *Ibid*, Page 56.

as the fluctuations of civil government, are probably a fruitful source, from whence inferences are commonly drawn to prove the mutability of Ecclesiastical establishments; we shall therefore still pursue our researches a little further on this head. For it is worthy of observation, that civil Politics however just, rational, or perfect in themselves; yet they must ever yield, and receive in no small degree their complexions and constitutional forms from the particular states, and conditions of society; nor is there perhaps a better established maxim in the circle of political truths than this; that the enjoyment of the full exercise of rights, liberty, and privileges in civil government is only compatible with a truly virtuous and enlightened state of society; whilst prevailing ignorance and general depravity in the great body of the people, inevitably subjects the degraded community to the imperious will of a despot, or else what is perhaps much worse, to that of an aristocracy. And we may add, that however debased, yet they may still subsist as a community, and as the proper subjects of some form or other of civil government. But then, these are observations which will by no means apply to the christian church; the very idea of which, implies knowledge, and virtue in the members which compose it, and which knowledge and virtue, if deficient amongst them in that degree, as to
disqualify

disqualify them from the exercise and enforcement of Apostolic discipline and government; then this deficiency must, also in the same proportion disqualify such community from being truly or at all a church of Christ.

BUT again, if the Apostolic polity is mutable as is above supposed, then it will follow, that authority to effect such alteration, is some where or other constitutionally deposited. But that it is not deposited in "the chief Rulers of the church," (as the third proposition intimates,) is obvious, because the Pastors who were the chief Rulers, "had not the power to decide or enact any thing without the consent of the Presbyters, and People.^a" (Matt. xx. 25, 26, — 1 Pet, v. 2.) And, that power of this nature, is not any where deposited in the church; is apparent from reason, because inferior authority is not competent to alter the establishments of that which is superior. It is also manifest from the testimony of the Ecclesiastical historian; because whilst he detects, and denounces the innovating doctors of the second and third centuries; in their unconstitutional assumptions, he no where presents us, in the first, or any other century, with the church, or its officers, constitutionally claiming or exercising such authority. And it is likewise strikingly evident from the divine word; because whilst it is destitute of any express commands,

^a Mosheim's Eccl. Hist. Vol. 1, Page 76.

commands, authoritative examples, or even intimations which might imply a right in ordinary ecclesiastical power, to abrogate or alter Apostolic establishments. It on the contrary contains express commands, and explicit intimations which strongly imply their perpetuity; "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and lo! I am with you alway, even to the end of the world." (Matt. xxviii. 20.)* "Hold fast the form of sound words which thou hast heard of me. (2 Tim. i. 13.) And again St. Paul to the Corinthians, "Be ye followers of me even as I also am of Christ. Now I praise you brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances as I delivered them to you. (1 Epistle Ch. xi. 1, 2, ver.—see also 1 Cor. 7, 17.) Should it be replied, that Matt. xviii. 18, confers authority on the church to repeal even Apostolic institutions; because Christ promises, that "whatsoever they should loose on earth, should be loosed in heaven." The

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answer

* This promise, evidently, could not personally have belonged in its full extent to the Apostles themselves, as they were all soon removed from this world; nor could it to a succession of Apostles: because none have appeared since that period with credentials of that dignity and authority. But it is fulfilled in the divine authority of the doctrines which they taught, and institutions which they established.

answer is obvious, namely, that the context limits that promise of church power to the repeal of Ecclesiastical censures. For if that passage is not thus limited, but is taken literally, then it may be considered as investing the church with authority to disannul the ten commandments themselves, and with power to loose the bands of all moral obligation.

BUT resuming the foregoing argument, we may observe, that as neither the church itself, nor yet its chief rulers, are competent constitutionally to alter that system of government originally devised and erected therein by Christ and the Apostles; and as no human authority is adequate to change or abrogate Apostolic institutions, it will follow that this system wherever practicable is of course immutably permanent. And consequently may not "be accommodated at the direction of the chief rulers of the church, to times, circumstances, exigencies, &c. &c." But having thus replied to the foregoing objections of the divines of the church of England, &c. as well as to them urged by Dr. Mosheim, and Mr. Wesley, we are now to consider others which may, or have been raised to the same purpose.

AND first, it will perhaps be objected, that it is highly inconsistent, thus to admit the testimony of the above historians in one respect, and yet to reject it in another: be-
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cause their testimony if found to be erroneous in one case, it of course is dubious in every case, and is consequently deserving of but little credit. To this we reply, that there is no manner of inconsistency in admitting the *matters of fact* which these able historians relate from the authority of the authentic and genuine records of antiquity ; and in refusing the inferences which they have themselves drawn therefrom, where they are evidently not the offspring of reason, but appear to be the result of prejudices to particular systems. Nor does this inconsistency in these great men derogate in the smallest degree from their integrity as historians, but on the contrary abundantly strengthens it ; because whilst they faithfully record the Ecclesiastical establishments, and transactions of antiquity, in opposition to their own opinions and systems, they are to be considered as true witnesses, and their testimony respecting the Ecclesiastical arrangements of the first century as more valid, than if their own sentiments and opinions had coincided therewith.

OBJECTION II. But "those who assert that the Ecclesiastical system established in the first century, was designed by the Apostles to be an unchanging model for the christian church in all succeeding ages, are not agreed concerning the precise nature, and form of that system itself."

ANSWER. This objection possesses but little

little force of argument, as it is one which may be retorted ; because neither are such as maintain the mutability of this system, agreed amongst themselves, either as to the constitutional mode, or power of its alteration ; some supposing that it should be accommodated to the state of the “ nation,” and others to that of the “ church” itself : and whilst one places this authority in the hands of the “ civil magistrate,” so another deposits it with “ the chief rulers of the church,” a third ascribes it to the church alone. But that this objection is altogether absurd, and utterly destitute of any authority, is manifest ; because if admitted, it is equally subversive of the doctrines of the gospel and of all other truths, and systems on which the fallible minds of men may have happened to disagree.

OBJECTION III. “ But the christian church in the days of the Apostles, was only in its infancy, and therefore, however well adapted the Ecclesiastical system of that age, might have been to the condition of the church at that time, yet a more adult state might afterwards require an alteration of that system.” To this it may be replied, that admitting the church to have been at that period, in an infant state as to duration ; or even as to the number of communities then established, when compared with those of after ages : yet it will not follow that it was in an infant
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state in a variety of other respects. For as to numbers, that of Jerusalem attained immediately to an adult condition; nor was either it, or a multitude of the other christian communities in that age of miraculous endowments, in an infant state with respect to grace, knowledge, or other necessary gifts. But when we view the christian church as then under the immediate inspection, and direction of the Apostles themselves, we must discover it as in its pristine glory; and be constrained to confess its understanding and knowledge as to doctrines and government as arrived to their fullest maturity. And that the Apostles in devising and establishing a political system, for the christian church, contemplated not so much, a small and infant condition, as a numerous and adult state of each christian community, is manifest: Because whilst their system is evidently, and perfectly accommodated to the latter case of each christian assembly, it in some instances as to a plurality of Elders, is undeniably impracticable in them of the former description. But when we thus contemplate the nature and perfection of that system thus instituted by Apostolic knowledge and wisdom, it becomes manifest that was there even authority to alter it, yet such alteration would be not only unnecessary, but even pernicious: and from hence it will follow that the force of the above objection,

which supposes such alteration expedient, is utterly overthrown.*

BUT

* It may be highly expedient to notice here, an assertion in Mosheim's Ecclesiastical History, which may be viewed as in some degree hostile to the system of government which had existence in the primitive churches. For in Vol. 1, Page 71, treating of the powers exercised by the people in the churches of the first century; he sums them up into one view, by observing "in a word, that the assembly of the people exercised all that authority which belongs to such as are invested with the sovereign power." And immediately after in the same page, under the head of oblations, asserts, that "the people indeed had, in some measure purchased these privileges by administering to the support of their rulers, ministers, and poor, and by offering large and generous contributions when the safety and interests of the community rendered them necessary." But this assertion of the purchase of privileges, is evidently ill founded; and that for two reasons; first, because this liberality of the people was no more than was their duty. And secondly, because Mosheim had himself just before declared this authority to have been invested in the people by the apostles themselves; for says he, "the people were undoubtedly the first in authority; for the Apostles shewed by their own example, that nothing of moment was to be carried on, or determined

BUT briefly summing up the chief of the foregoing arguments, we maintain, first, that the system of Ecclesiastical government established by the Apostles in the church of Jerusalem, and which "was the model of each of the several polities of all the other churches erected during the first century," is still obligatory on every christian church wherein it is practicable to carry it into full effect according to the true intention of it; because that in such case it is a divine institution, which has been once obligatory, which has never been repealed, and which is still practicable according to the true intention of it: For all divine institutions which have been once obligatory, which have never been repealed, and which are still practicable according to the true intention of them, are of course still obligatory.

SECONDLY, we assert, that even where the establishment of a plurality of Elders or Presbyters is impracticable, yet that this partial inability does not destroy the obligatory influence of the residue of that institution, as it respects such particular community. 1st. Because such impotence in the community is not a forfeiture on the part of the Pastor, of his official rights, or authority. And 2dly. Because even on the part of the people, such impotence cannot imply in any
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determined without the consent of the Assembly." (Pages 70, 71.)

wise a forfeiture of their elective privileges,
 or legislative or judicial authority ; and con-
 sequently if the Pastor and people thus re-
 tain their rights and privileges conferred on
 them by the residue of that system ; then of
 course, that residue retains towards them its
 obligatory influence. And 3dly. In oppo-
 sition to objectors, we maintain 1st, that
 " Jesus Christ has not only clearly and ex-
 pressly commanded something concerning a
 part of the precise method according to
 which his church should be governed." But
 when we consider the seven churches in
 the Revelation as the " representatives of the
 whole christian church throughout the whole
 world, &c." And that they in common
 with all the other christian communities of
 that age were in possession of a compleat
 Ecclesiastical form of government, evangel-
 ically copied from that divine system estab-
 lished by the Apostles at Jerusalem ; and re-
 member that Christ has commanded these
 churches, and in them all others, to hold
 fast what they were thus in possession of ; we
 are therefore emboldened also to maintain,
 that he has clearly and expressly commanded
 the observance of the whole precise method,
 according to which his church should be
 governed. 2dly. That much more is taught
 and exhibited in the divine word concern-
 ing the form of government to be observed
 in the christian church, than there is taught
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and exhibited therein, relative to the observance of infant baptism, female participation of the eucharist, or the christian sabbath; and consequently that the latter cannot be more permanent in, or obligatory on the christian church, than the former is thus permanent and obligatory. 3dly. That although forms of civil government are necessarily mutable, as being the productions of fallible men, and as changing with the fluctuations of the state of society; yet that no just inferences can be drawn therefrom importing similar mutations in Apostolic Ecclesiastical government; because whilst the latter was devised under the unerring influence of divine inspiration, so it was by Apostolic wisdom and authority, every where uniformly established, not only without respect to the different customs, manners and establishments of the numerous nations wherein churches were planted; but even in direct opposition to the despotism of their civil forms of government; whilst by Apostolic concurrence the external forms of public worship every where yielded to the pressure of these arduous external circumstances. 4thly. That this divine polity is constitutionally immutable wherever practicable, because not connected with any discoverable mode or power of constitutional alteration. The construction and departments of the government itself, afford no authority to justify

justify attempts of this nature, in the officers or people, or in them conjointly. Reason forbids an inferior authority to subvert the establishments of that which is superior ; the holy scriptures countenance no innovations of this nature ; for whilst the sacred penmen of the New-Testament, pronounce divine precepts, and exhibit Apostolic precedents for the establishment, and exercise of a government in the church of God, they no where intimate that such institutions may be dispensed with ; but on the contrary in some instances particularly enjoin their strict and perpetual observance. And the Ecclesiastical Historian, whilst he exhibits that strict uniformity of government which every where subsisted in all the christian churches of the first age, as established by the Apostles ; yet he no where presents us (although well disposed thereto) with any constitutional alteration made or attempted in that government, within the first, or any other century of the christian era. And lastly, we add, that the Apostolic polity, where truly practicable is to be considered as constitutionally immutable ; and as indispensably obligatory upon all christian communities, until such time as it shall be as expressly, and evidently revoked or altered by an authority as undeniably divine as that which at first gave it existence.

It remains now to close this part, with an
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awfully interesting quotation, from the Ecclesiastical Historian ; wherein he informs of the unhappy subversion of this divine system, and of the dire effects which immediately followed thereupon. For in the third century, and long before the depraving days of Constantine, “ The face of things began to change in the Christian church. The ancient method of government seemed, in general, still to subsist ; while, by imperceptible steps it *degenerated towards a religious Monarchy* : For the Bishops aspired to higher power, than they formerly had possessed ; and not only *violated the rights of the people, but the privileges of the Presbyters*. This change in the form of ecclesiastical government, was soon followed by vices which dishonored the character of those, to whom the administration of the church was committed. For tho’ several yet continued illustrious examples of christian virtue ; yet many were sunk in voluptuousness, puffed up with arrogance and ambition, possessed with a spirit of contention, and addicted to many other vices.— The Bishops assumed in many places a princely authority ; and the example of the Bishops was imitated by the Presbyters ; who, neglecting the sacred duties of their station, abandoned themselves to indolence and luxury. And the Laity trod in their steps ; so that even in the middle of this century, the

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main body of Christians went as far in all ungodliness and unrighteousness, as the heathen themselves.^a

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^a *Wesley's Eccl. Hist. Vol. 1, Pages 129, 130.*

PART THE THIRD.

Technical Terms appertaining to Methodism, briefly explained. Rank, Order, and Authority of the Methodist Officers, different in these Respects from them of the Apostolic Institution, although nearly similar, as to Name. Number, Qualifications, and Election. Ordination threefold. Methodist Legislature different from them of Apostolic Institution. A Host of antient and modern sectarian Rule-Makers, briefly taken Notice of. Methodist Rules of Discipline threefold. General Rules considered. Rules of the Band Societies; And of the Preachers.— Methodist Courts of Judicature, dissimilar to the Apostolic. Their Executive Department also, in like Manner dissimilar. A summary comparative View of Apostolic and Methodist Ecclesiastical Systems. An important closing Quotation.

TECHNICAL terms which appertain to the government of the Episcopalian methodists, although for the most part particularly defined in the eighth edition of their discipline, yet on this occasion it will be needful concisely to explain the following of that description, viz. Society, Classes,

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Bands,

Bands, Tickets, Circuits, Districts, Quarterly Meetings, Conferences, and Ministers.

SOCIETY. This term may be considered as synonymous with that of Church; for it is applied to "a company of men, having the form and seeking the power of godliness, united in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love;" and who have administered amongst them the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper.

CLASSES are formed by dividing each society into companies, each to consist of about twelve persons. One of which number presiding over the rest "is styled the Leader."—These Classes meet weekly for the purpose of prayer, examination, confession, exhortation, &c. and strict attendance in them, is deemed so essential, that wilful and repeated neglect in itself, without any other fault, if persisted in, after admonition by an Elder, Deacon, or Preacher, is followed by excommunication. This institution seems to have been borrowed from the Moravians.

BANDS. As the Classes are divisions of the Societies, so the Bands are select subdivisions of them, being each composed of "two, three, or four, *true believers*, who have confidence in each other. In one of these Bands, all must be men or all women; and all married, or all single." Their meetings are weekly, but neglect, or repeated omission,
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is not punished with expulsion, as in the Classes.

TICKETS consist of a shred of paper given to each member of the society, with a short portion of scripture ; and the holder's name inscribed thereon. The Elder, Deacon, or Preacher, who has the charge of a Circuit, renews it quarterly : and, whilst it serves as the badge of church membership, it answers also another important purpose ; for as the refusal of a Ticket is tantamount to exclusion, and as the officer who thus renews it, is in some cases invested with the power of refusal, it of course must serve to keep alive in the minds of the people a sense of their subjection, and of the authority of their rulers.

CIRCUITS are composed of such societies or churches, as are under the particular care of an Elder, Deacon, or Preacher, who either singly or in conjunction with others of his itinerant brethren, visits each society in rotation, at regular and stated periods.—The number of societies requisite to form a circuit is variable and arbitrary.

DISTRICTS are formed at the discretion of the Bishop, by a combination of not less than three, nor more than ten Circuits ; and during his absence, but by his appointment, each is governed by a presiding Elder.

QUARTERLY MEETINGS are held in each Circuit, and are composed of such of the
“ Ministers, travelling and local Preachers,
Exhorters,

Exhorters, Stewards, and Leaders, as can attend." These meetings may be considered as ecclesiastical courts of appeal.

CONFERENCES are termed District and General. The former are held annually in each district, and are composed of all the Elders and Deacons, and of all the itinerant Preachers therein, who have passed the probationary state. And the latter are held at Baltimore once in four years, and are constituted of the Bishops, presiding Elders, Elders, Deacons, and itinerant Preachers in full standing, assembled from all parts of the connexion.

MINISTERS. This appellation appears to be applied only to the Bishops, Elders, and Deacons.

PROCEEDING now to investigate the Methodist Ecclesiastical Polity, and to compare it with that devised and established by the apostles, we shall therefore pursue for the most part, the same method of arrangement already observed in our researches into that divine system. We begin with Organization. This as referring to the officers implies, as already noticed, Rank and Order, Number, Qualification, Election, and Ordination.

RANK and ORDER. Their officers consist of Bishops, presiding Elders, Elders, Deacons, itinerant Preachers, local Preachers, Exhorters, Stewards, and Leaders, and constitute nearly as many distinct orders as they.

they bear appellations. For the Bishops, Elders, and Deacons, are not only set apart from the lay officers and brethren, by ordination, but in like manner are also set apart from each other. The order of Bishops holds the first place in the Hierarchy ; that of Elders, the second ; and of Deacons, the third. The Elders and presiding Elders are of the same order ; but the latter are elevated to an higher rank or station, than the former, by the Bishop ; and may perhaps not improperly be considered as his Legates. The lay officers compose five distinct orders, viz. that of itinerant Preachers, local Preachers, of Exhorters, Stewards, and Leaders. But this hierarchy although thus composed of an eightfold order, whilst that of the Apostles (if we except the Deaconesses) contained but two ; yet the former differs not so much, nor so essentially from the latter, in the number, as in the nature of its orders. For whilst on the one hand we behold an Apostolic Bishop presiding in one Presbytery composed, for the most part of but three or four Presbyters, and ruling a single congregation, but so restricted in his authority over them, that he has “ not power to decide or enact any thing without the consent of the Presbyters and People ; we on the other discover the Methodist Bishop presiding in their district and general conferences, the latter composed of Elders, Deacons, and Preachers, amounting, perhaps,

unto some hundreds ; we behold him invested with authority to dictate to each (without the alternative of appeal) the time and place of his ministerial labours, and overseeing the temporal and spiritual^(a) concerns of many hundreds of churches, dispersed through a space nearly co-extensive with that of the habitable boundaries of the United States. The Elders or Presbyters of the Apostolic churches, we also find, were in their office and authority, located to individual churches, where their powers were still more circumscribed than those of the Bishops. But the Methodist presiding Elders, we may perceive, each at the head of a district containing several circuits, a multitude of churches, and no inconsiderable number of Elders, Deacons and Preachers ; and over whom in the intervals of the conferences, and absence of the Bishop, he exercises the authority of removal from one circuit to another.^b And whilst the Apostolic Deacon is not only restricted in the exercise of his functions to an individual community, but is also precluded from participation in the pastoral authority ; we recognize the Methodist Deacon, if not presiding over a district, yet having the charge of a circuit, containing it may be ten, twenty, or more churches,

(a) *Methodist Dis. 8th Edit. Sect. iv, v, Chap. i.*

^b *Ibid, Chap. i, Sect. v.*

churches, presiding in the circuit quarterly meetings ; and enforcing quarterly fasts in each congregation ; receiving, trying, and expelling church members, and having under him itinerant and local preachers, &c. &c. into whose conduct he authoritatively inspects ;^(a) so that nothing can be more manifest than the prodigious difference in the natures of those orders ; although they bear appellations nearly similar. And as the Deacons of the Methodists resemble not so much the Deacons of the first age, as they do the Metropolitans of the third century. So the Stewards appear to be appointed as a kind of substitute for Deacons ; for to them it appertains to account for all money collected, and distributed towards the support of the ministers and preachers, and relief of the sick and poor ; to stimulate the societies to greater liberality, and to provide the elements for the sacred supper, &c. &c.

NUMBER. In each of the Apostolic churches, when duly and fully organized, we have already noticed a Bishop, Presbyters, and Deacons, as its constitutional apportionment of those officers. But the Methodist societies, or churches, although multiplied into many hundreds, if not thousands of communities, can rarely produce more than a single Bishop. They have indeed nominally a second ; but as
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^a *Meth. Dis. 8th Edit. Sect. x. Chap. i.*

he spends much more of his time in Europe, and in traversing the Atlantic, than he devotes to labors amongst his widely dispersed Flocks in these States, he must be considered as bearing little more than the honorary title of Bishop in his extensive diocese. And each Methodist community, instead of having Elders and Deacons, at the same time stationary therein, it is perhaps not unfrequent for a circuit composed of ten, or twenty different churches, to be destitute of the labors of a plurality of these officers. The number of itinerant and local preachers which appertain to each community is variable, and uncertain, some few having one, or more of these officers in each, whilst many others are but transiently visited by those of the itinerant order.

THE Stewards although a kind of lay Deacons, yet they appertain not so much to particular churches as to a circuit, in each of which, not fewer than two, nor more than four are appointed. The Leaders constitute the lowest order of the hierarchy; but as they amount to about a twelfth of the whole number of each community, their influence might prove hostile to the government, was not their continuance in office optional with the ministers and preachers who have the charge of the circuits.

QUALIFICATIONS. In the examination of candidates for the itinerant orders, particular enquiry

enquiry is made, as to their attainments in the ministerial qualifications of gifts, grace, and fruits ; and that there are amongst them, some who are eminently endowed in all those respects, must readily, and with pleasure be acknowledged.

ELECTION. This as having reference to judging of the qualifications of candidates for the ministry, appears to be exercised by the Methodist people, only in the solitary instance of giving a testimonial of approbation to the ordination of located Deacons ; but election as implying the Apostolic right of suffrage in the choice of their own officers, is a thing utterly unpracticed and unknown amongst them.

ORDINATION in the Apostolic churches was conferred on Deacons and Elders, or perhaps more properly on Deacons and Presbyters. But the consecration of a Deacon was not a prelude to that of the Presbytery ; Presbyters having been constituted such by a single ordination. And as the titles Bishop, and Presbyter were synonymous, and “ used promiscuously in the first ages ; ” so no plurality of ordinations is discoverable in the first century, whereby the Presbyter was translated into a Bishop : for although a ruling Presbyter, or Pastor, was appointed in each church from amongst the Presbyters, or Bishops ; yet no ordination appears to have been then used, but this appointment was probably

probably effected by the electing voice of the community, without the aid of any further ceremony.*

BUT Ordination amongst the Methodists is threefold and progressive ; that of the Deacons being an indispensable prelude to the Eldership, as that of the Elders is to the Episcopal chair.

As leading objects in the consecration of the Bishop are to array him with singular honours, and to invest him with no slender share of authority ; so the ceremonies observed in his ordination are calculated to promote these important ends ; for whilst the Candidates for the Eldership are presented by one Elder only ; the Bishop elect is introduced by two. The former are thus ushered in ; "I present unto you these persons present, to be ordained Elders ;" but of the latter it is said, "We present unto you this godly man, to be ordained a Bishop." Significant interrogation instructs the Elder in passive obedience ; "Will you reverently obey your chief ministers, unto whom is committed the charge and government over you ; following with a glad mind and will their godly admonitions, and submitting yourselves

* *There appears to be no certain evidence of the re-ordination of Presbyters, until some time in the third century. And Cyprian of Carthage, and Cornelius of Rome, afford perhaps the first instances of its being evidently practiced.*

yourselfes to their godly judgments ?” But of his high authority, the Bishop is apprized, by a query no less expressive ; “ Will you correct and punish all such within your district as shall be *unquiet, disobedient* and criminal, according to such authority as you have by God’s word, and as shall be committed unto you ?^(a)”

THE itinerant lay preacher, although not instructed in ordination, thus reverently to obey his chief ministers as the Elders and Deacons are ; yet he is not left exposed to the egregious folly of consulting his own reason ; nor to the danger of exercising his own judgment in the employment of his time and talents in ministerial labors ; nor yet to the crime of using “ his liberty” (1 Cor. x. 29.) in reading, meditating, or praying, as his own conscience might dictate ; but is taught implicitly to yield himself up to these “ godly admonitions” of his superiors. “ *Act in all things not according to your own will, but as a son in the gospel ; as such it is your duty to employ your time in the manner which we direct ; in preaching and visiting from house to house ; in reading, meditation, and prayer.* Above all, if you labor with us in the Lord’s vineyard, it
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(a) Query. *Should any other Ecclesiastical authority be conferred on any Bishop whatsoever, but that with which the word of God invests him ?*

is needful you should do that part of the work which we advise, at those times and places *which we judge most for his glory.*^a

AND when he passes the probationary state he is presented, not with the sacred oracles, as the code of rules, by which he is to walk, but with a system, which, for the most part, is of human invention, and on which is this inscription, "As long as you freely consent to, and *earnestly walk by, these Rules*, we shall acknowledge you as a fellow labourer."

LEGISLATURE. The Methodist General Conference constitutes the ecclesiastical legislature of that people, and as such is not divisible, appertaining to each particular church, as in the apostolic age. Nor is it evangelically composed of the whole community, officers and people, but of the Bishops, Elders, Deacons, and itinerant Preachers, in full standing; and in that exclusive sense, as not to admit of a single delegate from the people; nor yet of one to represent any particular church in the whole connexion.^b

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^a *Meth. Dis. 8th Edit. Chap. 1, Sect. 8.*

^b *The advocates of the above, and of similar ministerial assumptions, have, in support of their cause, frequently had recourse to Heb. xiii. 7 and 17; where the Apostle exhorts, "Remember them which have the rule over you;" and again, "obey them that have the rule over you, &c."*

BUT this Legislature, although thus absorbing the divinely chartered rights of each particular church, and notoriously subversive of the unalienable legislative privileges of the people ; yet it differs not more from the apostolic model, in its construction, than in the powers which it avowedly assumes.

THE unconstitutionality of church legislatures intermeddling in the composition of rules, for the regulation of "life and manners," has already been demonstrated. The

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Ec." But how extremely futile are all arguments in this cause, which are predicated on these texts. For it is manifest, that St. Paul here makes mention of "rule" or authority, not in an absolute, but relative and restricted sense ; not as signifying that all ecclesiastical authority was invested in the Pastor and Presbyters, but only as implying that degree of it, which they constitutionally possessed. For in the first part of this book, it has been very abundantly proved, that the elective, judicial, and legislative powers were evangelically deposited in the whole community ; and as Christ is not divided against himself, it will follow that this apostle could not have had any thing in view, in these texts, prejudicial to those rights and privileges, apostolically inherent in the people : and therefore all that St. Paul here intended by the term "rule" was evidently the executive authority, and such other official powers as the Pastor and Presbyters evangelically possessed.

inventers and prescribers therefore of such "rules and forms of discipline," must in seeking a precedent, have recourse to some other authority, than to the example of the primitive church legislatures. For to perfect by supplementary rules, those prescribed to the church by the blessed Redeemer, and his Apostles, was an exploit first attempted by certain aspiring individuals of the fourth century :^a amongst whom, Anthony of Egypt is distinguished above his fellows ; as by his dexterity in this art, he attracted the monks into a body, who till then "had led solitary lives in the deserts of that country ;" but who were now induced to dwell together "by fixed rules," of devotion and discipline. The cotemporaries and competitors of Anthony, were Athanasius, Basil, Pachomius, and Augustine, who had each his rules and his group of humble followers. Encouraged by the success of these first self-created lawgivers, a host of sect makers, emulous to excel their predecessors in the didactic art, now present themselves ; composed of Popes, Bishops, Abbots, Canons, Heroes, and Heroines ; each offering at the shrine

^a Montanus, who flourished in the second century, devised indeed an appendix for the completion of the New-Testament precepts ; but as he impiously assumed the title of the Paraclete, or Comforter, he cannot with propriety be classed with ordinary innovators.

shrine of superstition, his, or her system of studiously manufactured rules. Amongst these zealots we behold, Innocent of Rome, and his book of thirteen rules; Martin of Tours, introducing monkery into the west; Benedict of Nursia; whose disciples in the ninth century "held unrivaled, the reins of the monastic empire." Bernard, whose disciplines stimulated the Knights Templars to Don Quixote feats; Robert, his rules, and Cisterciens in train. Bruno giving laws to the austere Carthusians; Ignatius of Loyola, disciplining his Jesuitic band. In a word Dominic, Francis, and De Basse receiving homage from their fighting, preaching, cowl-caped, begging, and barefooted Friars. Nor should we omit Clara, and Theresa, the former ingeniously instituting rules for the poor sisterhood; and the latter, a Spanish lady, by her discipline reforming the backslidden Carmelites.

But whatever influence the lust of fame, or dominion, may be supposed to have had on the conduct of this sanctimonious tribe: candour must admit the probability, that a devout intention stimulated in some degree the minds of at least some of them. The world they must have beheld was dissolute, professors languid, and religion but too little regarded. To seclude, therefore, a certain portion of the community, who by continued devout exercises, should retain the
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favour of grace, appeared to them a plausible mean of diffusing amongst the rest of their fellow men the sacred leaven. Whilst to direct and establish these sequestered ones, rules more strict than were suitable for common Christians, were considered as necessary. But their zeal was blind ; they mistook the genius of the Christian religion, which is rational and social, for the whimsies and gloomy reveries of fanaticism. They forgot, they neglected the sacred oracles, and hence not giving "heed" to this "more sure word of prophecy," but following their own devices, their understandings were darkened, and notions of duty childish ; so that instead of that sound morality, and divinely adjusted discipline of the gospel, all the fooleries of superstition became triumphant.

BUT when we behold the Methodist General Conference in 1784, at Baltimore, "approving," and enacting "a form of discipline" for the regulation of the lives and conduct of that community in America, and contemplate the same body in 1792, revising, and with some few alterations, again ratifying of it ; we shall instead of making comparisons that may be construed to be invidious, attempt a candid investigation of this system thus established.

THE rules contained in the Methodist discipline, may be arranged under three heads. First, such as extend to the whole community.

ty. Secondly, those restricted to the Band Societies. And thirdly, the "Rules of the Preachers." The first are termed "General Rules of the United Societies,^(a)" and have these observations annexed to them, "These are the General Rules of our Societies; all which we are taught of God to observe, even in *his written word, which is the only rule, and the sufficient rule both of our faith and practice.*^b" There are also two other rules, which, though not comprehended in the above, yet are general. The first is, that each member of the society, or church, shall meet in class once a week, unless necessary business, sickness, or distance prevents. And the second, that all those who neglect thus to meet, shall, after admonition, by an Elder, Deacon, or Preacher, be excluded, but with this proviso; —that the officer who thus cuts off the offender, shall shew that it is done, not for immoral conduct, but for breach of their rules of discipline." But when we contemplate the "written word," can either of these rules be discovered therein? Has Moses and the prophets instituted class meetings? or has Jesus Christ and his Apostles made strict attendance in them a condition of church membership? or have the evangelists declared that the penalty of non attendance in them, is exclusion from

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^a *Meth. Dis. 8th Edt. Page 45.*

^b *Ibid, Page 48.* ^c *Ibid, Page 50.*

the sacred supper, from the society of their brethren, is excommunication from the church of the living God? And if these rules are not contained in the "written word," why added thereto, when it is the "the only rule, and the sufficient rule of our conduct," and when it is acknowledged to be such?

THE Rules of the Band Societies, amongst others, contain those which follow, viz. To desire and design when interrogated in the Bands, "and on all other occasions, to be entirely open, so as to speak without disguise, and without reserve.^a" "To taste no spirituous liquor, unless prescribed by a Physician;" "Not to mention the fault of any behind his back, and to stop those short that do;" And "to observe, as days of fasting or abstinence, all Fridays in the year.^b" The first of these rules, requires of each person in Band, when interrogated, to reply without disguise, and without reserve. But was that question asked, "What temptations have you met with since the last meeting?^c" might not such unreserved openness in reply, in many cases improperly interfere with family concerns, and marr domestic blifs? But admitting that no such improper questions were propounded, may it not innocently become matter of doubt, and prudently

^a *Meth. Dis.* 8th Edt. Page 51.

^b *Ibid*, Page 52. ^c *Ibid*, Page 50.

ly a subject of enquiry, whether all this openness is safe, or requisite ?

WERE men either what they ought to be, or what they often profess to be ; or had they souls formed for friendship, like David's and Jonathan's, then confidence would not be betrayed. But it should be remembered, that foul hypocrisy may appear in the fair garb of religion ; and that others, like "Alexander and Hymenius, making shipwreck of faith, may put away a good conscience." Besides, was even each member a believer in reality, and one who should never apostatize ; yet are there no defects of love, patience, humility, or of knowledge amongst them ? And might not the babe, or novice, be himself in some cases injured by unreserved communication ? (John xvi. 12, — 1 Cor. iii. 2.)

It is perhaps a cardinal object in the institution of the Methodist Bands, to render each the seat of sublimest friendship. But if so, why invade friendship's sacred rights ? Why not each person have it optional to select his, or her bosom friends ? That choice is infringed, is evident ; because the Preacher is directed "as soon as there are four men, or women believers in any place, to put them into a Band.^a" But why this capricious rule of all in a Band, being married, or all single ? Would the hymenial vows have dis-

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^a *Metb. Dis. 8th Edt. Page 25.*

severed a Damon and Pythias, a Scipio and a Lealius, or the already mentioned, inseparable David and Jonathan?

It is indeed conceded, that friendship reigns most securely within religion's hallowed temple. That its pleasures are most refined where divine love gives law to the human heart. But still innocent and involuntary attachments of nature, arising from similarity of dispositions, of judgments, of age, and habits, as well as affinity, and a variety of other and nameless circumstances, all combine to give stimulus to friendship's sympathetic ties. But this construction of the Bands is not thus enlarged upon, from a supposition that the institution itself is Apostolic, but because it is inconsistent with, and hostile to itself, in thus marring that confidence, which it perhaps designed to have established.

We are now to consider that rule which forbids the use of "spirituous liquors, unless prescribed by a Physician." But when the mischiefs which arise from these inebriating fluids, are contemplated; when it is remembered that they are so generally, and so fatally pernicious to multitudes, who, at the expense of time, health, reason, property, character, domestic peace, and even of the soul itself, delight to scorch their vitals with these liquid fires, it becomes difficult to plead in their behalf. But as "King Lemuel" directs

rects to "give wine to those that be heavy of heart;" (Prov. xxxi. 6,) and as the Psalmist informs that the Lord furnishes not only with "oil to make the face shine," but also with "wine, that maketh glad the heart of man," I shall therefore plead a little in behalf of the use of this kind of spirituous liquors. It is conceded, that in the New-Testament, directions are given to "use wine medicinally, and sacramentally." That "drunkenness and excess" therein are forbidden. And that being addicted, or "given to much of it," is prohibited. But when, or where therein is a temperate use of it forbidden? Are we bound by the law of the Nazarites? (Num. vi. 3,) or is the Christian believer of the house of the Reckabites? (Jer. xxxv. 6.)

WHEN at Cana of Galilee, the Lord and his family of Apostles, honored the marriage state with their presence; who will affirm, that on that festal occasion, they partook not of the fruit of the vine? Or who will assert that the contrary is not probable? Was therefore a disciple of Christ now bidden to a marriage, and was the juice of the grape presented, would it be a crime in him to congratulate the bridal pair before a Physician had arrived to prescribe the medicinal glass?

"Not to mention the fault of any behind his back; and to stop those short that do;" are precepts evidently well intended. But are they equally judicious? Are we certain that

that St. Peter, Demas, Alexander, and Hymenius, or any of them, were present, when St. Paul, in his Epistles, made mention of their faults? (Gal. ii. 12, 14. 2 Tim. ii. 4. 1 Tim. i. 20.) And if it is thus, at times; expedient and profitable, to be reminded of a "Lot's Wife," is it eligible always to stop those short who mention the faults of an absent person? May they not sometimes in this Apostolic manner communicate admonition, and instruction to edification? It is true, "there is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword." (Prov. xii. 18.) And "the words of a talebearer, are as wounds that go down into the innermost parts of the belly;" and whom to still in his career, would be salutary, as the staying of a raging plague. But will stopping the talebear short, be in all cases a handling of the matter wisely?" Will it not be often needful to consult Time, Place, Age, Rank, and Character, &c. least we should only irritate whom we had meant to have reclaimed? "But wisdom is justified of her children," and in no case is her maternal influence more needful than when they become reformers.

As to the appointment of "All Fridays in the year to be days of fasting or abstinence;" it is a stretch of power perhaps very far exceeding that, which evangelically appertains to church Legislatures; even
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when more apostolically constructed than that from whence this rule has originated.

WHOSOEVER attentively examines the New-Testament, must perceive, that whilst fasting is taught by Jesus Christ and his Apostles to be incumbent on Christians ; yet, that they have no where therein enacted any law whatsoever, which enjoins set days, or stated periods, for the observance of that duty. It is, however, certain, that both by word and example, they have explicitly intimated the occasions to which it is adapted. First to a time of mourning or affliction : “ Can ye make the children of the bride chamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them ? But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days.” (Luke v. 34, 36.) Secondly, when entering on affairs of extraordinary importance. Thus Christ’s ministerial labours were preceded by a fast of forty days (Matt. iv. 2,) and Barnabas and Saul after “ fasting and prayer,” were separated to labor amongst the Gentiles. (Acts xiii. 2, 3.) And thirdly ; when it appears to Christians a duty, to give themselves more especially to prayer ; then fasting may evangelically be united therewith. (1 Cor. vii 5.)

ABSTINENCE was practised by St. Paul and his companions, when long exposed to the perils of shipwreck ; (Acts xxvii, 21, 33,) and is that kind of fasting, which, whilst it comports

comports with the case of persons long in affliction, likewise best accommodates the feeble and the delicate.

But if the foregoing observations are just, will it not follow, that as the occasions to which fasting and abstinence are adapted, are not so much of a periodical and fixed, as of an incidental and uncertain nature.^a And therefore that the appointment of all Fridays in the year for the observance of these incidental and occasional duties, tends towards their perversion; because the circumstances which render them proper, may thereby, in a variety of instances, be unconnected with them?

BUT this subject deserves further investigation. Fasting and abstinence may be denominated, National, Congregational, Household, and Individual; and the right or power of appointing them, will perhaps, on due attention, appear to be properly deposited in as many different hands as there are cases to which they belong. With respect to the first: a nation is menaced with, or languishing, groans under some awful calamity: what religion teaches, nature itself sanctions; by refusing usual sustenance, it intimates

^a The terms "are not so much of a fixed and periodical nature, &c." are used, because the "undertaking of, and being engaged in affairs of uncommon moment," may, in some cases, be fixed and periodical.

timates the necessity of fasting and self-abasement. Reason, now consulted, powerfully enforces to the constituted authorities, the admonishing suggestions of nature and religion. The chief Magistrate, as the national organ proclaims—the remotest boundaries hear. Each tribe, in haste, in sackcloth, is summoned to the footstool of its God. Obedient to the powers that be, the Christian is humblest in the retirements of his closet, is foremost in the hallowed fane. Like another Moses he stands in the gap. Like another Israel, he wrestles and prevails. The Father is propitious through the intercession of the Son. The ravaging foe retire in astonishment. The Angel of destruction sheathes his flaming sword. The plague is stayed, it ravages no more in the city. Whilst the cloud that lowered pestilence and dearth, now replenishes with watery stores the long parched soil.

BUT whilst a nation is generally happy, evil may be located. Judgment beginning at the House of God, distempers may stalk in parochial rounds. Or, an unusual langour, or more than ordinary inattention to religion may affect a congregated body; under each or either of which circumstances, will it not be incumbent on that body to edify itself (Eph. iv. 16.) by calling a solemn assembly, and keeping fast before the Lord?

NOR is a family though small, secure from
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the shafts of disease. Though few in number, the hand of the Lord may visit with sore affliction ; or grace may arrest, teaching them righteousness and repentance. Thus circumstanced, fasting, or abstinence may be expedient, but who shall decide ? Their ministers, or their own judgments and consciences ? (Rom. xiv. 4.) Human forms of discipline, or the word of God ? Is it not discretionary, and may they not fast on whatsoever day of the week they judge expedient ? and who is authorized to call in question their liberty ? (Rom. xiv. 12, 13.—1 Cor. x. 29.) And in like manner an individual may be in personal affliction, or engaged in special supplications, and prayer : but when, or in what manner to combine fasting or abstinence therewith, is unquestionably his, and not anothers, right to determine.

But we pass on to “ The Rules of the Preachers,*” and amongst which the following

* “ The cause of Christianity suffered deeply (says Mr. Wesley) by a capital error, which was received by the Christian church in the second century. Jesus Christ prescribed to all his disciples, one and the same rule of life and manners. But certain Christian doctors were induced to maintain, that Christ had established a double rule of sanctity, for two different orders of Christians ; the one for persons

ing more particularly demand our attention, viz. To "chuse and use water for their common drink." To "converse sparingly and cautiously with women." To have always a Bible about them." But lastly, to "spend the day as the Conference advises.^a"

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persons in the active scenes of life, and the other for those in a sacred retreat. In consequence of this wild system, they divided into two parts, all the moral doctrines and instructions in scripture; one of these divisions they called precepts, and the other counsels. They gave the name of precepts to those laws that were universally obligatory on all orders; and that of counsels to those that related to Christians of a more sublime rank, who breathed after an intimate communion with the Supreme Being. This double doctrine produced a new set of men, who made profession of uncommon sanctity, and declared their resolution of obeying all the counsels of Christ. They looked upon themselves as prohibited the use of things lawful for other Christians to enjoy; such as Wine, Flesh, Matrimony, and Commerce. They thought it their duty to extenuate the body by watchings, abstinence, labour, &c." "And from hence, in process of time, arose that train of austere and superstitious vows, celibacy of the priests, and rigour of mortifications, which cast a veil over the beauty of the Christian religion." Eccl. Hist. Vol. 1, Page 99, 100.

^a Met. Dis. 8th Ed. Pages 21, 28, 29, and 30.

THE first of these rules, and which requires of the Preachers, to “chuse and use water for their common drink,” as it cannot be supported from the New-Testament, so it appears to rest altogether on the supposition, that water is in general “that kind of drink which is best both for soul and body.^a” But until this supposition becomes demonstrated, it perhaps would not be criminal to sharpen the beverage of the purling fount with a little of the juice of the Lime, or Apple; or to mingle it with such other qualifying ingredients as circumstances and temperance might render expedient.*

To “converse sparingly and cautiously with women,” is a rule possessing perhaps more of the appearance, than of the reality of excellency therein. It is considered as a comment on 1 Tim. v. 2, where St. Paul directed Timothy to “intreat,” or exhort “the elder women as mothers, and the younger as sisters, with all purity.” But is there a full agreement betwixt the text and comment? Do the appellations expressed or implied

^a *Meth. Dis. 8th Edit. Page 30.*

* *So extremely frivolous is this, and are others of the rules under consideration, that any notice taken of them seems to require an apology; and it may perhaps be a sufficient one, just to remark, that however trifling they may appear to many readers, yet they are all highly venerated by those who enact and observe them.*

implied in the former correspond precisely with the shy reserve intimated in the latter ? Is not the church a family allied, through the consanguinity of grace, where easy and friendly intercourse becomes each member of the sacred household ? But the church is not only a family in which the Christian minister is a son or brother ; it is also a flock over which he is a shepherd, and in which capacity it is more his duty than his crime, with circumspect familiarity, frequently to converse with all, and each committed to his charge ; until such time therefore as this intercourse betwixt the Christian minister and the aged matron, or pious sister, is proved to be incompatible with the most rigid rules of “ purity ” of heart and life : the rule under consideration, must be viewed as designed to be more the palladium of *celibacy* than that of purity. And perhaps it was requisite ; for were the Methodist Preachers in consequence of this innocent and laudable intercourse with the other sex, to be generally induced like St. Paul’s Christian Bishop (1 Tim. iii. 2, 4,) to become each an husband and parent ; the consequences might greatly derange, if not utterly overthrow the itinerant system of that community.

For the Preachers to have each “ a Bible always about them,” comes now under consideration. But certainly this rule is not enjoined in the Bible itself, nor is there any

authority to believe that it was observed by Jesus Christ, his Apostles or Evangelists; and yet it is certain that the Bible contains every precept; and that Jesus Christ, his Apostles, and Evangelists practiced every duty requisite to render the man of God perfect. The Preacher it is true is directed by the Conference to "read some part of the Bible every day, carefully, and with prayer," and to do it "fruitfully by immediately practicing what he learns therefrom." But still all this may be performed without his "having a Bible always about him." It would seem from the requisition in this rule, that the Preacher's time was to be disposed of, and his conduct and actions regulated by the Bible alone; and was even this the case, still the rule before us might be dispensed with, as a few select passages, from the "lively oracles," faithfully treasured up in the mind, might full as well direct all his footsteps throughout the busy hours of the day, as the whole volume could in his pocket.

BUT this rule becomes still less necessary, when it is considered, that the Bible is not thus designed to be so general an instructor to the Preacher; for the next informs us, that he is to "spend the day as the Conference advises." And amongst the instructions given by the Conference, for the apportionment of the Preacher's day, we shall notice the following; first, "from four to five in the morning, and from

from five to six in the evening, meditate, pray, and read the scriptures, with notes, and the closely practical parts of what Mr. Wesley has published.^a Secondly, "From six in the morning till twelve (allowing an hour for breakfast) read with much prayer some of our best religious tracts.^b" And lastly, the interrogation which requires "meditating, at set times by rule.^c" But whosoever attentively contemplates man, beholds not only in his person, and features, a diversity of shapes, proportions, and aspects, various as the individuals are numerous who compose his race; but also discovers in his mind a variety of dispositions, and powers, perhaps not less multiplied than are those distinctions of face and person. But diversity of character and condition, have existence not only amongst men, they also have place in the same man: and who can tell in how great a degree, whilst progressing from ruddy youth to decrepid age, through life's uneven path; when a single day effects such changes, when the variations of the atmosphere alone can make such impressions on the barometer man! Can depress, or elate, qualify, or unfit, for intensive study? But to this variable and diversified condition of men, how exactly do gospel dispensations, and the operations of divine grace accommodate themselves.

^a *Metb. Dis.* 8th Edt. Page 36. ^b *Ibid*,
 Pages 36, 37. ^c *Ibid*, Page 29.

selves. The God of grace mars not the works of the God of nature. Apostles and Evangelists when renovated, are not indiscriminately cast in the same mould ; Peter comes out a son of thunder, and John of consolation. Apollos is not deprived of his eloquence, nor Paul of his reasoning energy, or learning. And when gifts are distributed nature is still consulted. Talents are given to every man " according to his several ability." (Matt. 25, 15.) " To one the word of wisdom, and to another the word of knowledge, &c." (1 Cor. xii. 8, 10.) But those talents are to increase, to multiply in proportion as they are diligently employed. (Matt. xxv. 28, 29.) It behoves therefore the man of God, diligently to search the " holy scriptures which are able to make him wise unto salvation." (2 Tim. iii. 15.) He is to " give attendance to reading," to " take heed to himself and to his doctrine," to " meditate on these things, and give himself wholly to them," that in so doing his " profiting may appear unto all," and that " thereby he may save himself, and those that hear him." (1 Tim. iv. 13 to 16 vs.) But whilst Paul the aged, in this manner instructs his " son Timothy," no mention is made of " meditating at set times by rule ;" nor are any fixed hours, for reading, and private devotion enjoined. But is Paul herein guilty of an omission which the wisdom of after ages must

must rectify? Or rather has not the wisdom of the Lord and his Apostles, designedly left the adjustment of these circumstances to the discretion of each Christian minister himself? And is not this individual liberty indispensable? This œconomy of the gospel precisely adapted to the nature and condition of the servant of Christ? For what particular hours of reading, meditation, or private devotion, could have been adapted to the accommodation of all? Must not some have been burdened much beyond their ability, whilst others were curtailed to limits far within those which superior grace, or talents had required? Or suppose such particular hours of devotion and study, to have suited at five and twenty or thirty, might they not have become ineligible for the same person at fifty or three score? But when the Methodist Preacher takes these important subjects more fully into consideration, will he not break his fetters? Dare manfully to assert his unalienable rights? Give latitude to his expanding mind, by venturing to explore at discretion beyond the limits of the "closely practical parts of what Mr. Wesley has published," or of the "religious tracts" issuing from the Methodist Press. Instead then of "throwing by all the libraries in the world," least by application to reading, he should frustrate the salvation of souls; he would feel it incumbent on him through
"attention"

“attention to reading,” richly to furnish his mind with various knowledge ; that like the well instructed scribe, he might “bring out of his treasures things new and old.” (Matt. xiii. 52.) Occasionally studying natural philosophy, “through nature he would ascend to nature’s God.” And ranging at large in the extensive, entertaining, and instructive paths of the histories of nations, or of the Christian church, he might contract a “taste for reading,” and thereby happily supersede that peremptory mandate, “return to your former employment.”^a

JUDICIAL DEPARTMENT. Their Courts of Judicature are of two kinds. First, such as are for the trial of impeached Bishops, Elders, Deacons, and itinerant Preachers. And, secondly, those which take cognizance of the located lay officers, and private members of each community.

A Bishop, accused of immorality, examined by three travelling Elders, and by them considered guilty, may be tried before a special tribunal, composed of two presiding Elders and four ordinary Elders (or in place of the latter, of two Elders and two Deacons from neighboring districts) with the three Elders first mentioned. Two thirds of this Court on conviction of his guilt, are authorized to suspend him from office ; but the next General Conference, as the high Court
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^a *Metb. Dis. 8th Edt. Page 37.*

of Appeals, may confirm or reverse this sentence : and to this Court of Judicature appertains the power not of suspension only, but even of expulsion itself.

AN Elder, Deacon, or Preacher, under the report of immorality, is amenable before a tribunal composed of a presiding Elder, and of three, or more ministers. This Court on proof of guilt is invested with authority to suspend the culprit, till the meeting of the next district Conference ; to which, as an higher tribunal the case is referred, for a second discussion. This Court exercises the power of excommunication ; but its sentence is not always definitive.

IN case of the indulgence of improper tempers, words, or actions, the delinquent Elder, Deacon, or Preacher, is admonished by a senior officer, first in private ; but on a second offence, the admonition is repeated in the presence of two or three Ministers or Preachers, after which, if reformation is not effected, the offender is arraigned before the next district Conference ; and which requires of him repentance, under the penalty of expulsion.

SUCH Ministers or Preachers as are accused of holding and teaching doctrines, contrary to the Methodist "Articles of Religion," are proceeded with as in cases of immorality, but with this restriction, that the person so offending is borne with until the next meeting

ing of the district Conference, on condition of "solemnly engaging, neither to preach nor defend, in public or in private, such erroneous doctrine.^a" But it is to be observed, that in all these cases "of trial and conviction,^b" an appeal to the ensuing general Conference is admissible.

As to the Courts which take cognizance of the misdemeanors of the located lay officers, and private members, they may be denominated inferior and superior. The former are each composed of the society to which the delinquent belongs, or of a "select" part of it; and in each a Bishop, Elder, Deacon, or Preacher, presides. But the quarterly meetings constitute those of the latter description. These tribunals admit of appeals from the others of their respective Circuits, and their decisions are final.

BUT when we review this system, how glaring the difference betwixt it, and that divinely established by the Apostles; for whilst we here perceive a six-fold fabrication of ecclesiastical courts, we can discover but a single kind of tribunals divinely erected in the Apostolic churches. And as these are facts which can neither be denied nor controverted, is it not incumbent on the Methodist general Conference to produce the authority by which it has acted, in the institution of five such extraordinary tribunals? And does it not

^a *Metb. Dis. 8th Ed. Page 39.* ^b *Ibid.*

not also, equally behove the persons who compose them, narrowly to inspect the origin of their official powers, lest they should presume rashly to exercise, in the church of Christ, an authority which appertains not evangelically to them?

BUT again, even those tribunals of the Methodists which most resemble them of divine institution, yet how widely different are they from the latter in respect of authority, For whilst the Methodist Judicatories which appertain to particular churches exercise no authority whatsoever, which extends to the trial of impeached Bishops, Elders, Deacons, or itinerant Preachers, it was far otherwise with the Tribunals of the primitive churches, where "each Christian assembly" enforced discipline "upon its respective members,"^a and consequently upon its own Bishops, Presbyters, and Deacons, as necessity required. For when the Lord Jesus Christ gave existence to a judicatory in his church, each community was itself that tribunal; (Matt. xviii. 15, 16, 17, 18) and each was invested with all judicial authority. No provision therefore was made for special courts; nor any arrangements for district or general Conferences, as courts of appeal. Nor were any tribunals then erected favouring of ecclesiastical aristocracy, whereby Bishops, Elders, or Deacons, became independent of

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^a *Wesley's Eccl. Hist. Vol. 1, Page 66.*

responsibility to their respective churches. No, this statute of the adorable redeemer, which thus erected a court of judicature, in each christian church, became also at the same time, the great palladium of ecclesiastical judicial rights, and authority ; it divinely ascertained the principles of equal and impartial justice : For the same law it rendered obligatory, and the same tribunal authoritative to the offending prelate, and transgressing lay brother. And as each christian community was thus constituted, that tribunal in which all crimes, and all culprits were amenable ; so its sentence was not revokable by a "quarterly meeting," but was decisive, being ratified or "bound in heaven."

BUT the Methodist tribunals which appertain to particular churches, differ from the Apostolic, as well in respect of construction as in that of authority ; and this difference is two fold. First, in the presiding officers ; and secondly, in composition. As to those officers of the first age, they were at once located in, and amenable to the churches in whose tribunals they presided. But the Methodist presiding officers are neither thus located, nor amenable. And with respect to composition, although the primitive tribunals were each constitutionally composed of the whole of each community, or of each church in its corporate capacity : yet those
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of the Methodists, may be each constituted of but a part, or of a "select number" of the members of its respective society; whilst the persons so selected, and their numbers are wholly discretionary with the presiding officer. Nor are the pernicious effects of this innovation trivial; for it infringes most egregiously not only on the invaluable and unalienable rights of the precluded members, but also on those of the others who constitute this tribunal; for as their admission is through the arbitrary choice of the presiding officer, it rather implies a favor conferred, than even toleration, or sufferance, in the possession and exercise of a privilege that should have been independently held by tenure of divine right; for each private member has no less claim to a place, and voice in the church, when acting in its corporate capacity, than the Bishop has to preside therein upon all such occasions.

BUT this construction of tribunals by selection, may be considered likewise as hostile to impartiality of trial. For as the presiding officer is necessarily frail, and fallible in common with other men, prepossession for, or against the accused brother or sister may take hold of his mind: others of the church may be in the like predicament, and of these infected persons, the *selection* designedly, or inadvertently, may constitute the court for trial. And of course too much lenity, or
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what is worse, too great severity will characterize the judicial sentence. Innocence will suffer, or guilt escape with impunity. In one instance a righteous person is cut off from the congregation of the faithful, and from divine ordinances; whilst his or her character sustains irreparable injury. And in the other a rotten member, iniquitously continued in the body diffuses contagion and guilt through a whole community.

BUT an ecclesiastical judicature composed of the whole male community, presents itself as the divine guarantee of impartial justice in each christian church. Its numbers, diversity of dispositions, views, and sentiments rendering general prejudice and combination difficult and improbable; whilst united deliberations give stability to the rights of the whole. (Prov. xi. 14.) Nor can the most dignified member dispense with the aids of the meanest; the "head" needs the "feet," the eye is not independent of the hands, nor yet the ear of the tongue. (1 Cor. xii. 21, 22, 25, 26.) And in no case whatsoever is the care, sympathy, and helpfulness of all the members more needful than when judicial amputation is contemplated.

It will perhaps be suggested, that an appeal to the quarterly meeting, affords more ample security to the impartial distribution of justice, than is to be expected from the decisions of the church alone. But why

are strangers more competent to decide on the conduct of an impeached brother or sister, than the brethren are of the same community? Are not the latter possessed of the best means of information respecting the general deportment, and special conduct of the accused? Does not exaggerated report in general, and in such cases, urge its way on rapid pinions, whilst truth far in the rear, progresses with but tardy steps? And may not therefore the members from sister churches assemble in quarterly meeting, under the influence of misrepresentation or prejudices so strong, that after evidence will be incompetent fully to eradicate? And besides, did not the Lord Jesus Christ and his Apostles by conferring decisive authority on the church tribunals, (Matt. xviii. 18;—1 Cor. v. 45,) thereby evidently intimate that ecclesiastical courts of appeal were unnecessary and inexpedient, if not utterly unconstitutional? But even admitting the necessity and constitutionality of such tribunals, yet could this of a quarterly meeting be deemed either expedient or safe, when it is remembered, that this court is altogether composed of officers, and of officers too, who are constituted such, wholly independent of the authority, or electing voice of the people?

BUT in their judicial arrangements, it is not merely the diversity, nor construction of

their tribunals that appear objectionable. Their mode of procedure towards such as are accused of holding and teaching doctrines contrary to the Methodist "articles of religion,*" may perhaps be also justly called in question. For the impeached minister or preacher, on "solemnly engaging neither to preach nor defend such erroneous doctrine in public, nor in private," is borne with until the next district Conference. But admitting the doctrines so believed and impeached are deemed thus erroneous by the court which examines them; yet may not the culprit himself remain utterly insensible, and unconvicted of his mistake? And should he under such circumstances be induced to "cease to defend in public, or in private," what he thus conceived to be the sacred truth of the gospel, would he not do horrible violence to his conscience? And would not those who thus required and rewarded such apostacy become partakers with him in the guilt?

EXECUTIVE. The powers of this department in the primitive churches, indisputably appertained as before noticed, to the officers who presided in each church. The Pastor or Angel was properly the executive officer, and in his absence, or under his direction, the Presbyters discharged occasionally the duties

** How much better to make the word of God alone, the test of all religious doctrines!*

duties of that station ; and these powers in the Methodist community, are deposited in the Bishop, presiding Elders, and in the Elder, Deacon or Preacher who has the special charge of a circuit. But as Bishops and Elders of the Apostolic age were located in, and amenable to the churches over which they presided ; and as the Methodist ruling officers are at once itinerant and independent of their respective churches : Therefore the powers of each executive must be considered as deposited, in very different hands.

BUT taking here a summary view of the foregoing systems thus investigated, we in the first place remark. The barriers divinely erected to defeat the efforts of ecclesiastical ambition, in the genius of the Christian religion, which so emphatically requires abasement of heart before God, (Luke xviii. 14,) and humiliation of conduct towards man ; (Matt. xxiii. 10, 11, 12,) in divinely authoritative precepts to the Ministers of the Gospel, prohibiting the exercise of " Lordship over God's Heritage ;" (Mark x. 42, 43, 1 Peter v. 3;) and in the dignified independence and evangelical equality of each Christian community and Pastor ; where no Metropolitan dominion gives scope to the wily machinations of intrigue, nor patriarchal chair seduces the heart of the aspiring prelate. But secondly, whilst each Pastor is restricted from arrogating the rights of a
contiguous

contiguous brother, and each community from infringing on the privileges and authority of a sister church, the lines of internal power; we likewise recognize, as drawn with divine precision. The Pastor and Presbyters are rendered responsible in each respective community, for the due exercise of the executive authority; whilst the people become the repository of their own rights and privileges in the elective, judicial and legislative departments which they compose. But as human reason is feeble, and the knowledge of man imperfect and inadequate to direct his footsteps on all occasions, supreme Legislation in the church therefore appertains but to the Redeemer alone; who, as king over his people dictates each article for belief, and rule for the regulation of life and conduct, thereby happily leading them in paths of knowledge and righteousness. But when on the other hand we contemplate the Methodist polity, we behold the independence and rights of individual churches extinguished in an aggregate community. We discover the lures of ambition, which in the authority of bearing rule over a circuit or district, and in the rights of a Bishop to have dominion over all the Elders, Deacons, and Preachers in the community, present themselves with no feeble attraction to the mind of the aspiring Elder, Deacon, or Preacher. We perceive a self created Legislature, which not only prostrates

prostrates the rights of the people, but which even invades that of Christ himself in its prolific production of rules for the regulation of "life and manners." We discover also novel and diversified tribunals, which wrest ecclesiastical authority from the hands in which it had been divinely deposited. In a word, we behold a people despoiled of their Legislative and Judicial rights, and of the invaluable prerogative of choosing their own officers; whilst we contemplate the officers as absorbing in themselves the whole powers of government, whither Elective, Judicial, Legislative or Executive. Nor will it perhaps be foreign to the subjects now discussed, to close this part by a brief but vastly important quotation from that justly celebrated work the Federalist, viz. That "no political truth is of greater intrinsic value, or is stamped with the authority of more enlightened patrons of liberty, than that the accumulation of all powers, Legislative, Executive, and Judiciary, in the same hands; whether of one, a few, or many, and whether hereditary, self appointed, or elected, *may justly be pronounced the very definition of tyranny.*^a"

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^a Part Second, Pages 92, 93.

PART THE FOURTH.

Itinerant Preaching of the Apostles and Evangelists indispensably requisite in the first Age of Christianity. The Missionary Order of Itinerants evangelically succeeds, to extend the Limits of the Christian Church. Missionary Powers not superior to the Authority of Located Pastors. Various Circumstances which occasionally render Itinerant Preaching expedient. The Methodist Itineration considered as connected, in part, with some of the forementioned Circumstances. The Methodists at their first Rise not a distinct Sect. Their Assumption of a separate and independent Condition, laudable in some Respects, in others Censurable. Summary View of the Occasions proper for Itinerant Preaching. The present System of Methodist Itineration, not sanctioned by any former Precedents. The Methodist Revolution further examined. Objections to the Location of Pastors, refuted. Pernicious Effects resulting from the Methodist Itineration. Increased Variety of Gifts as produced by Itineration, considered: And particularly noticed, as it is an Appeal to that vigorous Passion in Man, "the Love of Novelty." Extemporary Preaching, its Advantages and Disadvantages, preferable to the Written Mode.

Mode; and combined with other secondary Causes, greatly has contributed to the Growth of the Methodist Community. Lastly, some general closing Inferences and Observations.

IT is designed in this part to consider some particulars, which though intimately connected with the Methodist system, yet could not easily have been combined with our former researches; and which here may be comprized under the heads of Itinerant and Extemporary Preaching. And lastly, to close with some general Inferences and Observations.

1st. ITINERANT PREACHING. On this subject, some few remarks have been already occasionally made; but as it may with much propriety be considered as a mainspring in the political machine of the Methodist Community, it is therefore deserving of more ample investigation:

DURING the infancy of Christianity, the services of Itinerant Preaching were indispensably necessary; as without its aids, the sacred illuminations of divine truth, must long have been confined to the narrow boundaries of Jewry: but through its peregrinations, the gospel soon shed its benign rays, not only over the Roman Empire, but also quickly diffused its salutary influence even throughout no inconsiderable number of the nations of the universe. But the heralds who thus itinerated were not of common, but of extraordinary

traordinary order : Apostles who stood in the first rank, even as ambassadors of Christ; and Evangelists in the second, who acted as their companions and sons in the gospel. Men, who, as to grace and talents were peculiarly equiped for the arduous undertaking, being filled with the Holy Ghost, richly endued with superior knowledge and authority, and who were also invested with the power of working miracles in confirmation of their testimony. But still, whilst these comets thus blazed through the universe, stars of inferior order and magnitude, were fixed by divine wisdom and authority in the firmament of each individual church. But so admirably in point is the Ecclesiastical Historian on this truly interesting subject, that I cannot here forbear transcribing at some length his sentiments and expressions thereon. “The great end of Christ’s mission was to form an universal church, gathered out of all nations of the world, and to extend the limits of this great society, from age to age. But in order to this, it was necessary, first to appoint *extraordinary teachers*, who should erect, every where christian assemblies; and then to establish *ordinary ministers*, who should enforce the doctrines delivered by the former. For the best system of religion must necessarily dwindle to nothing, or be egregiously corrupted, if it is not perpetually inculcated by

a regular and standing ministry." "The extraordinary teachers first employed, were the twelve Apostles, and the seventy Disciples, and to these the Evangelists are to be added."

"In order to have a just idea of the nature of the apostolic function, we must consider an Apostle as a person who was honored with a divine commission, invested with the power of making laws, of controuling and restraining the wicked when expedient, and of working miracles when necessary; and sent to mankind to unfold to them the divine will; to open to them the paths of salvation, and unite in the bonds of one sacred society, those who were obedient to the voice of God." "The accounts we have of the seventy disciples are more obscure than those of the Apostles: But it is highly probable that after Christ's ascension, they performed the functions of evangelists, and declared the glad tidings of salvation through different nations."

But notwithstanding that the office and order of the Apostles expired with the first heralds of that description; and though the extraordinary powers, and authority of evangelists, as acting in concert with, and under the express directions of the Apostles, became extinguished about the same time; yet it will not follow, that itinerant preaching then become unnecessary, or was incompatible with

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the true interests and genius of the gospel. For as it was requisite that "this gospel of the kingdom should be preached in all the world, for a witness unto all nations:" (Matt. xxiv. 14.) and as there were still many nations wherein its truth had not been heard; it of course became expedient, that through successive ages, missionaries should be sent forth to declare amongst the heathen the glad tidings of salvation. And hence in the ages immediately following that of the Apostles, we find that such itinerants were sent forth with no small success by the churches already established. And though the arduous efforts of papal missionaries in subsequent periods were more detrimental than helpful to the Christian cause; yet we contemplate with pleasure the more laudable attempts of this nature since the reformation, and which have been attended with some fruits, as well amongst the pagan inhabitants of the east, as amongst those of this western continent. Nor should the present zeal and efforts of the British churches and missionaries be forgotten, whilst they so ardently and cordially labour to extend the boundaries of the Christian church, and to diffuse the light and liberty of the gospel into regions where Satan so long has held such myriads of our race, in that ignorance and thralldom which are ever inseparable from a state of the most abject idolatry.

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BUT whether we denominate these itinerants, missionaries or evangelists^a; still it is evident that their ecclesiastical authority is not superior to that of located Pastors and Presbyters. And so it manifestly appears to have been understood in the second and third centuries. For in the former of these periods, Polycarp, the Bishop or Pastor of the church of Smyrna, "sent Irenæus a Greek by birth, to preach the gospel amongst the Gauls^b"; and therefore the Christian churches of that age, must not have supposed the itinerating Irenæus to have been greater in authority than the located Polycarp. (John, xiii. 16.) Nor did Irenæus himself consider his itinerant or missionary powers to be greater than those of a located Pastor; for after founding the church of Lyons, he became himself the Bishop of it. And, as did Pothinus, of that of Vienne, which he had himself erected, under circumstances somewhat similar. And in the third century we discover the celebrated "Origen, a Presbyter of Alexandria, instrumental in converting a tribe of wandering Arabs to the Christian faith, on the invitation of an Arabian prince." But notwithstanding this great success which attended

^a For "an Evangelist is a preacher of the gospel to those who had never heard it." West. Notes on Acts xxi. 8.

^b Wesley's Ecclesiastical History Vol. 1, Page 95.

attended his transient mission, it does not appear that he ever claimed or exercised an authority higher than that of Presbyter.

BUT too much stress need not here be laid on either the opinions, or practices of the ancients. The case being obvious, that if any Itinerants lay claim to any authority superior to that of located Pastors, it becomes incumbent on them to produce the credentials of such assumed power ; but it is at the same time to be observed that the superintendence of a plurality of communities, in an infant and unorganized state, is admitted duly to appertain to missionary authority.

A new settled, and thinly inhabited country, also obviously affords a proper occasion for itinerant preaching, as without it a multitude of souls must wander in the wilderness as sheep without a shepherd. In such a country therefore, an open door presents itself for preachers of the gospel during their novitiate, to exercise their talents, not only to the great advantage of souls, but also to their own edification in the acquirement of that experience and knowledge which may be essential to their afterwards taking the oversight of a particular flock. And in such a situation, it also manifestly becomes even the Pastors of particular flocks, diligently to employ their leisure hours in disseminating the seed of the kingdom into regions beyond those of their prescribed limits.

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BUT a new settled, and thinly inhabited country (and such as many parts of these States are) requires also another kind of itinerant preaching distinct from those before mentioned, viz. A kind or degree of the missionary system. And thus also have various Christian denominations judged, as fully appears from the institutions of this nature to which they have given existence : and thro' means of which, "the wilderness and the solitary place have been glad for them, and the desert rejoiced, and blossomed as the rose." (Isa. 35. 1.) For through the toils of itinerant missionaries, the kingdom of the Redeemer has found enlargement in these States ; where uncultured minds, with impenetrable forests, had conspired to set barriers to its progress. But whatever attempts of this nature have been made by other denominations, or whatever success may have crowned such efforts ; still it must be acknowledged, that the Methodists within a few years past, have, in these respects, decidedly borne the palm away from them all.

BUT it should seem that there is at times, another circumstance which also renders itinerant preaching expedient* ; and that is a

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* A state of severe persecution, may be also noticed, as some times compelling Christian ministers to practice itinerant preaching. (Acts, viii. 4.) And it was thus, that the celebrated
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very fallen and degenerate condition of the church itself. For at the time of the reformation, such was the ignorance and superstition of that age, that "therefore the reformers studied with all possible care to instruct the people in the fundamentals of Christianity, with which they had been so little acquainted. And much pains was taken to send eminent preachers over the nation; not confining them to particular charges, but sending them with the king's licence, up and down to many places.^a"

AND it is under this idea of effecting a reformation, that the Methodists seem in a great measure to have conceived of the rise and progress of their system. For their Bishops in a prefatory letter to their system of discipline, observe, that they "humbly believe that God's design in raising up the preachers called Methodists in America, was to *reform the Continent*, and spread scripture holiness over these lands;" and add that "as a proof thereof, they have seen a great and glorious work of God, from New-York through the Jerseys, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia,

Menno distinguished himself so much; when in the sixteenth century, through different nations, and for the space of twenty five years, he visited with uncommon success the Ana-Baptists, who, during that period, groaned under the iron rod of a cruel persecution.

^a *Burnet's Hist. of the Reformation.*

Virginia, North and South-Carolina, and Georgia, as also the extremities of the western settlements." That the Methodist preachers have been instrumental of a great and blessed revival of religion in these States, must be readily admitted; although not perhaps in the same degree as the writers of the above letter may sanguinely imagine. For when it is remembered in how great a degree screaming and disorder in their meetings have at times been sanctioned by the highest authority amongst them; and with what confidence, even their illustrious founder has himself so zealously laboured to propagate the belief of (what he seems to have considered as) a kind of second new-birth*; it affords perhaps, just ground
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* This second operation as distinct from conversion, or the new-birth, they sometimes term "the second blessing," "sanctification" a "being saved from sin," or "being renewed in love," &c. &c. This peculiarity seems to have made no great figure amongst them, until the year 1760. Its revival at that time, we learn from Mr. Wesley. "On January 13th, about thirty persons were met together at Otley (about ten miles from Leeds) in order to pray, sing hymns, &c. When they came to speak of the several states of their souls, some with deep sighs and groans complained of the heavy burden they felt from the remains of inbred sin;
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of suspicion, that mistakes are sometimes made amongst them respecting the "work of God" itself, and also whether conversions

when one of them was desired to pray (the rest being on their knees groaning for the great and precious promises) he no sooner lifted up his voice to God, than the Holy Ghost made intercession in all that were present (some few having returned home) with groanings that could not be uttered. And in a while they expressed the travail of their souls by loud and bitter cries. They had no doubt of the favour of God; but they could not rest while they had any thing in them contrary to his nature. One cried out in an agony, 'Lord deliver me from my sinful nature.' Then a second, a third, and a fourth. And while he that prayed first was uttering these words; 'Thou God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, hear us for the sake of thy Son Jesus,' one broke out, 'Blessed be the Lord forever, for he hath purified my heart!' Another, 'Praise the Lord with me, for he has cleansed my heart from sin!' Another cried, 'I am hanging over the pit of hell! Another shrieked out 'I am in hell, O save me, save me!' While another said, 'Blessed be the Lord for he hath pardoned all my sins!' Thus they continued two hours; and before they parted, three believed God had fulfilled his word, and cleansed them from all unrighteousness. And it is observable, these are all poor illiterate creatures,

versions are not often publicly attested by them before sufficient fruits have established their authenticity.

BUT the forementioned "humble belief," respecting the reforming of "the Continent," although it seems to favour of monopoly, and as though neither Presbyterians, Baptists, Episcopalians, Congregationalists, &c. were to have any lot or part therein, or in "spreading Christian holiness over these Lands;" yet such has been their success in efforts of reformation that the claim (altho it cannot be admitted in that exclusive sense) is not utterly destitute of propriety, nor will this appear singular when it is remembered, that all of these denominations were also at their first rise, in no small degree instrumental of diffusing emulative reformation amongst them of a prior standing (Rom. x. 19.) And it is further and particularly to be observed that the Methodists in their infancy, had evidently the advantage over all others thus to revive religion, from that very singular

creatures, incapable of counterfeiting, and unlikely to attempt it." Eccl. Hist. Vol. 4, Pages 235, 236. And nearly to the same purport is his account of "Grace Paddy," in Pages 256, 257; and which, he thus closes: "Such an instance I never knew before; such an instance I never read! A person convinced of sin, converted to God, and renewed in love within twelve hours, &c."

gular and important circumstance, of their not having become a separate and distinct people, for more than twenty years after their first rise in this country : so that during that period they were more or less incorporated with most denominations ; for a member of the Methodist societies was not then obliged to withdraw from the church to which he formerly had belonged, but might consistently have become and continued a member of any Christian community whatsoever. And hence it was, that what Mr. Wesley observed of the Methodists in Europe, was then perhaps equally applicable to them in this country. " We all (says he) aim at one point, to spread true religion, as we are able thro' the three kingdoms (England, Ireland, and Scotland) namely, the love of God and our Neighbor, filling the heart with humility, meekness, contentedness, &c. teaching us, on the one hand, whatever we do, to do it all to the glory of God, and on the other, to do unto every man, what we would they should do unto us. This is our point. We leave every man to enjoy his own opinion, and to use his own mode of worship, and accordingly we give the right hand of fellowship to every lover of God and man, whatever his opinion or mode of worship be, of which he is to give an account to God only.^a"

But in 1784 this union of the American
Methodists

^a *Wesley's Eccl. Hist. Vol. 1, Page 280.*

Methodists with other denominations, was dissolved. This revolution appears however to have been conducted with some considerable consistency and moderation, as may be learned from the following extract of Mr. Wesley's letter on that occasion to "Dr. Coke, Mr. Asbury, &c." and printed in the English minutes of 1785. "For many years (says Mr. Wesley) I have been importuned from time to time to ordain part of our traveling preachers; but I have still refused, not only for peace sake, but because I was determined as little as possible to violate the established order of the national church,* to which I belonged.

"BUT the case is widely different between England and North America. Here there are Bishops who have a legal jurisdiction. In America they have none, neither any parish ministers. So that for some hundred miles together, there is none either to baptize, or to administer the Lord's supper. Here therefore my scruples are at an end: and I conceive myself at full liberty, as *I violate no order, and invade no man's right* by appointing and sending labourers into the harvest." This revolution then, of thus becoming a separate and distinct church, was doubtless fair and consistent, where there were none to administer

*The venerable old Gentleman was perhaps, rather scrupulous about the order and rights of a church, considered merely as national.

administer gospel ordinances; because that in such case, "no man's ecclesiastical rights were infringed." But it was not so where it interfered with the pastoral rights of ministers duly set apart to administer gospel ordinances, and evangelically appointed to watch over particular flocks: Nor was it any impediment to these rights, that those pastors and churches were not constituted national by the civil authority. And it will therefore manifestly follow; that the separation of the Methodists from all other communities, so far as it designedly drew off members from those Christian ministers and communities amongst whom their preachers had been received, and to whom as "Lovers of God and man, they had given the right hand of fellowship," was evidently an unhappy rent in the christian church, a derangement of gospel order, an infringement of pastoral rights, and a very flagrant violation of them avowed principles "of leaving every man to enjoy his own opinion, and to use his own mode of worship: and of aiming at the one point only of spreading the love of God, and their neighbour amongst them, &c." and of them very principles by which a door had been opened for their preachers amongst these communities.

We are not however, here to confound those communities which appear evidently pious, with those which may be only nominally
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so; because to have separated only from those ministers who may have been evidently immoral; or from such ministers and churches who tho' moral, yet expressly denied "the power of godliness," (2 Tim. iii. 5,) was an act not only not criminal, but was one highly expedient, and agreeable to the true genius of the gospel.

And it is in no small degree important, here particularly to attend to the very different aspect which the Methodist itinerant preaching assumed in consequence of this revolution, prior to that event: For it offered itself not as the tool of a party, or as subservient to sectarian zeal; but ostensibly as a vehicle of gospel truth, and as practiced to subserve the interests, and for the upbuilding of all pious denominations. But subsequent thereto it has been continued, not to promote merely the interests of genuine religion, but also to build up a particular sect (and it may perhaps be asserted without hazard) to erect the Methodist community in part, out of materials, diligently and artfully collected, from all other Christian denominations in these States. But here a summary view of the occasions proper for itinerant preaching, presents us with the infant state of Christianity, when Apostles and Evangelists itinerated; presents us with the condition of the heathen world, which requires missionary it-

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inherants ; likewise with a newly and thinly inhabited country, requiring a degree or species of the same system &c. And also with a degenerate and generally fallen condition of the Christian church, as in the days of reformation from popish superstition, &c. And lastly, we discover even a less fallen state of some churches, afford scope for Methodist labours of this nature : For whatever may have been the condition of other denominations, yet the difficulty is but too apparent, of exculpating from the censure of neglected discipline, of departure in government from Apostolic establishments, and of preaching too much a meagre system of morality in place of the genuine doctrines of the gospel : that numerous and great community, amongst whom, both in Europe and America, the Methodists have been most laborious and successful ; and yet it must be acknowledged, that even this community has not been destitute of its burning and shining lights.

BUT here we may perceive, that the first species of itinerant preaching was in its nature transitory ; the second limited and partial, and each of the others only occasional and incidental, and none of them calculated to constitute a permanent order of officers, or adapted to form a compleat or permanent system of government in the Christian church. But the Methodists since, or at their revolution, have introduced orders of itinerant ministers

ministers altogether novel : Not of itinerant Apostles or Evangelists, nor yet of Missionaries of any species whatsoever ; but of itinerant Bishops, Elders, or Presbyters, and Deacons, officers, which (if we may have any respect to names) should according to the Apostolic order have been permanently located. And which complex and truly ambiguous orders attempt to act at once, the part of Apostles, in dictating authoritative rules, &c. to the churches ; of Missionaries in wandering from place to place ; and of Pastors and Presbyters in taking the perpetual oversight of their several churches : And who, not even content with these assumptions, utterly wrest from the hands of the people, their unalienable rights and invaluable privileges.*

BUT

* *It may be proper to remark here, that however consistently the Methodist Preachers prior to that Community's assumption of a church estate, might have made or enforced their rules of discipline ; yet that after that event the case was extremely different ; because that in the first condition of that people, they were but voluntary societies, and as such were at liberty to form, or to suffer to be formed and enforced amongst them, any such rules and regulations as were not inconsistent with moral principles. But when they assumed the character and corporate capacity of a church, or of churches of Christ. Then of course the Apostolic Ecclesiastical*

BUT several arguments will perhaps be still offered in favor of the present system of Methodist itinerant preaching, founded on its supposed utility : As first, that more apparent fruits have resulted from it under its present modification, than were experienced under its former condition. To which it may be replied, that although apparent fruits plead strongly in its favour, yet they are by no means conclusive : First, because much of them may be only apparent, and consequently not real ; secondly, because where even genuine reformatations may have taken place (and no doubt, such has happily been the case) under Methodist labours ; yet they may have resulted not so much from the itinerant preaching of the Bishops, Elders, and Deacons, as from the labours of others of the Preachers, as well as from other and very different circumstances ; such as the particular states, and ardent, and faithful prayers of some societies ; and the divine blessing particularly sanctioning that part of the revolutionary system which was most consistent with truth and godliness. And lastly, because it is not only possible, but perhaps

siastical system became necessarily and indispensably obligatory on them : and they consequently could not consistently, have retained any of their former rules or arrangements, which were incompatible with the institutions, rights or privileges of an Apostolic Church.

perhaps fully probable, that a different system might have been attended with even greater, and much more happy fruits: for if a tacit covenant, or agreement betwixt the Methodists and other pious communities, has been egregiously violated by the former, in the full adoption of their present system, is it not probable that it has greatly obstructed their further usefulness amongst these communities, as well as greatly hindered the attendance of the divine blessing on their labours in other parts? And is it not manifest, that such a tacit agreement was in existence? For what is more obvious than that, in the infancy of the Methodist societies, hardly any one circumstance whatsoever contributed more to their growth, than the frequent and public avowal of sentiments at least to this effect, viz. That they considered not themselves as a distinct sect; that proselyting to a particular party or belief, or to modes of worship, was not even remotely their aim. But that their object was only the glory of God, and welfare of souls, in the furtherance of the true spirit and practice of religion amongst all Christian Communities. But what would it have availed, that principles so disinterested and liberal, were publicly announced by the preachers in their discourses, and (as we have already had occasion to notice) by Mr. Wesley in his writings (as the parent of Methodism) if these declarations had not been

cordially received, and confided in by the ministers and members of other communities? And from hence it will follow, that a tacit agreement or covenant, had then an actual existence betwixt the Methodists and other religious communities. And is it not equally plain and undeniable, that this tacit compact which induced the latter to open their hearts and houses to the former, was by them openly violated when the Methodists every where in these States became an entirely separate and distinct sect? And therefore when these circumstances are calmly and impartially considered, do they not strongly suggest a doubt, whether that system can possibly be altogether right, which has thus in so great a degree, originated in such an abandonment of such principles, once so solemnly, cordially, and advantageously ratified?

BUT still it should be observed, that it is not here even insinuated that the Methodists were bound to have continued always in their first capacity, as it is acknowledged to be evident that a door was providentially opened for them, to have assumed with honor and advantage a very different form. For when a considerable number of pious and respectable congregations offered themselves as sheep without a shepherd; the Methodists were then manifestly called to become reformers in Church government, as they before had

had been in doctrines experimental, and practical. How consistent then to have "ordained Elders in every church." How scriptural for such of the preachers as met the electing voice of a community, to have assumed the pastoral capacity. And how noble and honorable, then to have resigned into the proper hands those powers of government, of which an extraordinary emergency had put them in temporary possession.*

AND had this providential opening been but duly followed, what numerous churches might gradually have arisen, as the hallowed repositories of gospel light, and of Apostolic liberty and order. Nor are we to conclude from hence, that the abolition of the itinerant plan would have been then inevitable; because such preachers as were not separated to particular churches, might still, consistently have persisted to itinerate until such time as providential doors had in like manner opened for them: whilst others should still have continued to arise and fill their places, even as long as labours of that nature should have been requisite. And all this might too have been effected without the "violation of sacred order," or the "invasion of pastoral rights."

It may indeed be here objected, that there are not itinerant preachers sufficient to afford each church a pastor which might claim one, if even all the preachers were to cease.

cease.

* See the Note in Page 171.

cease from itinerating. But formidable as this difficulty is, it is far from insurmountable ; whilst the superior grace and talents of so many located preachers in the Methodist Community, designate them as proper candidates for the pastoral office.

BUT much more powerful objections still, are not unfrequently supposed to lie against the settling of Pastors in particular churches ; for how common is it, to hear it observed by the strenuous advocates of itinerant preaching, ‘ that settled Ministers and their hearers generally grow cold and dead in religion after a little time ; and that it is not at all strange for such effects to follow from a Minister’s preaching so often to the same people ; who from their having heard the same thing from him, so many times repeated over and over again ; are at length, as soon as he has named his text, able to anticipate all that he has to offer therefrom.’

THAT the above implied objections contain very considerable weight must indeed, without any hesitation be acknowledged ; because a single word cannot be offered in defence of them frivolous and indolent teachers, who, through want of fervency in zeal, or of diligent application to study, only entertain their hearers with the frigidity of insipid and formal harangues, or drowse them from sabbath to sabbath with the opiates of oft repeated dullness. But still these objections

tions cannot be admitted as in any degree conclusive against located preaching itself, however formidable they may be against the abuse of it. For if the system of stationary Pastors in the Christian church necessarily saps the foundation of Christian piety ; or if, upon the whole, it is not preferable as a permanent system to that of itinerating ; then it will follow, not only that the Apostles were not " wise master builders," in perpetuating the former, in preference to the latter ; but even that Christ himself partook with them in the mistake, when he so explicitly sanctioned this Apostolic institution, by upholding in the churches of Asia, the seven located Stars, with his own " right hand."*

WITH respect to the foregoing implication, that preaching statedly to one people, necessarily makes a minister of the gospel cold and dead in religion, it evidently is not supported by any good reasoning ; because all the powerful motives and considerations that should stimulate the itinerant preacher to holiness as a Christian, and to zeal as a labourer in the vineyard, should also in the same

* *How truly astonishing is it, that any, who wish well to the Christian religion, and who only duly consider these circumstances, in combination with Acts xx. 28, should ever presume to speak with any degree of slight of the institution of stationary Ministers in the Christian Church.*

same manner, stimulate the preacher of located order within his prescribed "line and measure : " viz. such as a due consideration of the vast evil of sin, and immense advantages of righteousness ; love to God as the supreme good, and to souls as his offspring ; zeal for the glory of the Redeemer, whose he is, and whom he should serve ; an abiding and penetrating sense of his, and his hearers relation to time and eternity, as well as a deep conviction of his being responsible for the faithful performance of his official duties. And certainly if these motives, and considerations, do not sufficiently influence him to becoming zeal, piety, and diligence, it is not because he is located, but because he is unfaithful.

AND as to the means, and inducements, which preachers may need, of acquiring variety of knowledge through reading, for the edification of their hearers ; the preacher of located order has evidently and decidedly the advantage : Not merely from the greater facility with which he may obtain proper books, or the larger proportion of leisure which he possesses carefully to peruse them ; but more especially from the immediate necessity which he feels himself under, of applying diligently to exercises of this nature. For it is manifest, that one who preaches but two or three sermons a week, to the same people for a course of years, needs

a much greater variety of subjects than another, who though he preaches every day, yet does it for the greater part each time in a different place; and who (it may be) in a circuit of three or four weeks, preaches but three or four sermons, because in that space, each discourse is probably delivered six or eight different times, and in as many different places? And so powerful to itinerants is this temptation to indulge in a spirit of indolence in study, that it is not perhaps unfrequent for the preacher to continue from month to month, and year after year, in this repetition of sermons, and until he even becomes himself weary of the sound of his own voice.

BUT if we should even admit (what is inadmissible) that the itinerant preacher enjoys upon the whole, the best advantages of acquiring that knowledge which is of the greatest advantage to the Christian church: still must it not be acknowledged that the rigours of the Methodist itinerant system, render that knowledge in a great degree abortive; and that in two ways? First, by prematurely destroying the health and lives of many of the preachers? For what is more pernicious in these respects, than a perpetual change of beds and habitation, and, than continual exposure to all weathers, amidst excessive toils of traveling, and accompanied with the exhausting efforts of preaching once or oftener almost every day, for some considerable

considerable time together? And secondly, by constraining no small proportion of the preachers, to locate, under circumstances highly disadvantageous to their after usefulness? For how destructive is it of ministerial talents and knowledge, that men qualified to shine as stars of the first magnitude in the firmament of particular churches, should be forced to "entangle themselves" in the secular "affairs of this life," and be subjected to the dominion of those, who as well in knowledge, and capacity, as in that of years are by far their juniors?

BUT if even the itinerant preacher's health is such, that it mocks at toil, and bids defiance to those rigours which have entombed his feeble brethren; still is he not exposed to dangers of more malevolent kind? Are there no rocks and shoals on which his piety may more peculiarly be shipwrecked? And should he escape all other ills, and only become infected with the sectarian lust of proselyting zeal, so as to "stretch himself beyond his measure," (2 Cor. x. 13, 14, 15,) the evil terminates not merely in the contamination of his own heart, but stalks with hasty strides throughout the land. The preacher's movements now are for conquest: seduction is in his van, and schism in his rear, and his first impressions are strictly followed up by a series of persevering efforts; whilst the inexperience of youth, credulity of ignorance, sickleness of the changeling, and even the stubbornness

stubbornness of dogmatism, all conspire to render him truly formidable to the peace, order, and prosperity of each incautious, and devoted community.

BUT it will perhaps be intimated, that however great the difficulties attendant on itinerant preaching may be; yet that the advantages resulting from the increased variety of gifts which it affords are so vast as abundantly to justify, the perpetual hazard of all the dangers which may appertain thereto.

THAT itinerant preaching, as practiced by the Methodists, is, transiently, productive of a greater variety of gifts in each congregation, than could be afforded to each under the Apostolic system of location, cannot indeed be denied. But still it does not follow that the former system is preferable to the latter; because the advantages derived from gifts (considered merely in themselves) appear to result not so much from greatness of variety, as from due apportionment, or an happy adaption of them to each community: For what is more strikingly apparent, than that there are many preachers, whose talents though eminently useful amongst an ignorant people, yet their labours would be scarce admissible amongst communities more enlightened? And on the other hand, that there are those whose superior gifts though happily adapted to subserve the best interests

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of the latter, yet could but ill accommodate themselves to communities of the former description? Was then an itinerant system to be formed, which would shift those preachers perpetually from congregation to congregation; and that either alternately or otherwise; it is very evident that then a much greater diversity of gifts would be afforded to each community, than if each preacher had located in that church, in which his gifts had rendered him most acceptable. But are we to infer from hence, that this variety of gifts would have enhanced the real prosperity of those communities? Or rather, is not the contrary highly probable? But if even a constellation of gifts more perfectly suited to the state of knowledge in the churches, could be attained through this itineration, it would perhaps, even still, remain more than matter of doubt, whether it would be either expedient, or lawful to attempt it. We will try the experiment amongst the Apostolic churches of antiquity. Let us here then begin with the church of Ephesus, over which Elders were appointed as overseers by the Holy Ghost,^a Let us extend our attention to the other Christian communities of that age, in each of which Pastors and Teachers were set, not by the will, wisdom, or authority of man, but of God, and of his Son Christ Jesus,^b through the suffrage

^a Acts, xx. 28. ^b 1 Cor. xii. 28—Eph. iv. 11.

frage of the people. And let us bear in mind, what can neither be denied nor controverted, viz. that all those officers were particularly responsible for the increase of grace and knowledge in their respective churches; and were of an order not transient, as that of Apostles or Evangelists, but divinely permanent in each Christian church. Let now then these Elders of the church of Ephesus, resign their charge, and itinerate to Corinth; whilst those of Corinth imitate their example and remove to Ephesus. But zeal for migration, stimulates at length the Pastors of the other churches, whom we now behold all assembled together in conference at Antioch, and nominating the Bishops of Rome, and Alexandria to the office of superintendants, in order to fix from year to year, the stations of those wandering Pastors in the different churches of Rome, Philadelphia, Alexandria, Thyatira, Pergamos, Sardis, Laodicea, &c. &c. Here then we behold an increased diversity of gifts in circulation, and a diversity in some considerable degree accommodated to the general state of knowledge in the churches. But still is not this itinerant variety evidently purchased at too costly a price? For what is become of divine authority, and of the divine apportionment of gifts and officers to each particular church? Is not the former slighted, if not despised,

despised, and the latter lamentably deranged? What is become of the elective rights of the people? Are they not egregiously violated? And have not the Pastors, in addition to their other misdemeanors, added that of desertion from their several posts? And if this subversion of the original constitution of the Christian church, thus involves the perpetrators in such enormous guilt; can we behold as innocent, those who, when called by divine providence to erect Christian churches, choose not as their pattern the divine model of the Apostles; but form in each community, a scheme of itinerant preaching and government; as if copying, in a great measure, after this very system of innovation and guilt?

BUT, we will now consider this variety of gifts in another respect, and in one which renders it a very principal spring in the Methodist itinerant machine; namely, as it is an appeal to that leading passion in man, *the love of Novelty*. That this active propensity, when duly governed and restrained, may subserve the interests of a future existence, as well as the happiness of the present life, cannot be denied: And our blessed Lord himself plainly intimates the propriety of its influence in religion, where he informs us, "that every scribe, who is instructed into the kingdom of heaven," is to make provision for
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its innocent gratification, when he "bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old." (Matt. xiii. 52.) But as this passion, through too frequent indulgence, might, like all others, have acquired an ascendancy over reason; and depraved the heart, and degraded the character, as in the case of the Athenians, who "spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or hear some new thing:" (Acts xvii. 21 :) Therefore for this reason as well as for others, the great Redeemer on different occasions was pleased to set the example of withholding the means of its excessive gratification. For Peter is rebuked, when with the prying eye of curiosity he seeks to know the future destiny of the beloved disciple. (John xxi. 21, 22.) And not only Herod is refused the novelty of a miracle, (Luke xxiii. 8, 9.) but even the favoured Eleven are repelled when they seek knowledge beyond edification. (Acts i. 6, 7.)

THE dispensation of the gospel we are therefore to view, not as stooping to gratify the lust of novelty, any more than that of gold, or of dominion; but as carefully withholding the occasions of seduction; whilst through a just appeal to nature, it assiduously labours to inform the understanding of man, and to heal the disorders of the human heart. Or to be yet still more explicit, the gospel is divinely considered as affording in itself sufficient variety, when faithfully preached,

ched, without having recourse to the expedient of a perpetual change of the ministers who dispense it. For although the Apostles and Evangelists itinerated for the space of one generation, yet their peregrinations were neither by quarterly nor annual rotation; but they removed, or were stationary as the special calls of divine providence, or as particular exigences of the infant churches required of them.

As to the precise degree of seduction to a criminal avidity for novelty, which may be caused by a perpetual indulgence in that variety of preaching which is produced by an annual, or quarterly change of the preachers; there are perhaps no rules by which we can fully ascertain it. But still, there are those by which this idolatrous passion can itself, in some measure, be discovered.

AND here it is to be observed, that as the propensity in question affects to be of religious kind, so its votaries repair for solace not to the crowded theatre, nor vagrant walks of romance: The common place news of each day, to them is unenviting: They revel not with the sons of dissipation; nor can even the gravity of the antiquary, entice them to glean variety, from the "tattered relics of old Time." Their resort is to the house of worship; there they seek amusement, and there bow before the idol novelty. St. Paul well describes such persons, as being affected
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with "itching ears," (2 Tim. iv. 3,) and as "heaping to themselves teachers;" that by the friction of novelty, the teasing sensation which torments them may become allayed. To persons then, thus languishing under this disease, how affecting is the tidings of an expected new preacher! their hearts expand, and curiosity stands as on tiptoe, until their souls even sicken through the ardency of expectation, and tediousness of delay. But the wished for moment at length arrives, and so perverted are their judgments, that blustering zeal, dogmatical assertion, distorted allegory, and high toned declamation, without argument or connection, are cordially received as the irrefragable evidences of one of the best sermons they had ever before heard. But whilst the novel opinion, or preacher, is received with enthusiastic rapture, with what apathy is the divine word heard, from the Preacher whose manner is no longer new. Neither superiority of knowledge nor of eloquence can now awake attention. Demonstration will no more convince, nor persuasion move; whilst even brilliancy of thought, and the well turned period, are despoiled of their once captivating charms, because now connected with a voice, action, and cadence, which frequency of hearing and seeing, have, at length, rendered familiar.

But it may be proper here to close this head, by observing, that so far as the
incessant

incessant change of preachers, as practiced among the Methodists, tends to excite this pernicious propensity to novelty, (and it is presumed, that a considerable degree of this tendency is highly probable) it is in the same degree an argument against the supposed helpfulness of that system, to the piety of those who freely indulge in all that variety which it affords.

II. EXTEMPORARY PREACHING. Of such vast consequence to human felicity is the preaching of the gospel, from age to age in the world, that the manner of its being preached, should never be considered as a thing indifferent. There are two modes of its performance,* the written, and the extemporary. The former admits evidently, of an accuracy and digestion of matter and argument, to which the latter can hardly ever be expected generally to attain : And, were all men Philosophers, or was reason, in each congregation, more prevalent and influential than passion, then the use of notes in preaching, could, perhaps,

* There may, indeed, be a medium betwixt both, and which, in some instances, might, perhaps, be preferable to either. For the general or particular heads of discourse, being on some occasions committed to writing, might secure much of the accuracy of written sermons, and yet leave considerable latitude for that energy and pathos, so peculiar to extemporary discourses.

haps but rarely be dispensed with. But the written sermon, if more accurate in composition, yet how frequently is it so palsied and benumbed in delivery, as to render it ineligible for the mixed multitude, whose understandings are best susceptible of impression through the intelligence of passion? To such, therefore, (and a majority of such there will ever be) the flowing eloquence of extemporary oratory, offers itself with peculiar grace. If lacking in correct arrangement, yet it excels in ease and fervor. If deficient in the regular forms of syllogism, yet how powerful are its arguments, when accompanied with its melting and persuasive eloquence? And whilst extemporary preaching avails itself of each gale of the affections in the audience,* to storm the strong holds of prejudice and of deep-rooted depravity, it also “rouses into action those powerful and sublime powers of the soul” in the preacher himself, and thereby inspires him

** It should indeed be here acknowledged, that from this peculiar facility of operation on the passions, which extemporary preaching possesses, it becomes exposed to very grievous abuse; for how evident is it, that many popular Preachers of this description, seem to have studied more the manner, than the matter of their discourses, and to have endeavored much more to excite passionate sensation amongst their hearers, than judiciously to have informed their understandings.*

him with more lofty sentiments, vigorous penetration, and persuasive utterance, than he before possessed ; so that now, he lightens, he thunders, and argues, with an energy, which even scepticism itself is unable to answer, or to resist.

THE written and the extemporary modes are each sustained by great and respectable authorities ; but the latter decidedly predominates, when its adoption by Jesus Christ and his Apostles, and by the Evangelists is considered. Nor will it be an objection of any force, that the Apostles preached by immediate divine inspiration, since it cannot be proved, that the Evangelists preached at all times, under an influence of that nature. And this objection against extemporary preaching, when not performed under an extraordinary divine influence, becomes still more futile, when it is remembered how universally it was thus performed, by the Pastors and Presbyters of all the Christian churches of the first ages.

WHEN we survey the Methodist system, and consider the rapid and extensive progress of that people, there is perhaps in the former nothing, which so much accounts for the latter, as extemporary preaching. We are not however, in contemplating the numbers, and rapid increase of the Methodist community, wholly to ascribe these circumstances, to any thing in the Methodist system
itself,

itself, as it is undeniable that the divine blessing has very powerfully co-operated with some parts of it ; and as it is evident, that the lukewarmness but too prevalent amongst other denominations, and the persecutions opposed to the progress of Methodism (especially in Europe) have each powerfully contributed to promote this augmentation of numbers. But still as particularly helpful thereto, we are in the forementioned system itself, to notice that zealous promulgation of the doctrines of Repentance, Faith, and Holiness, which it affords ; those indefatigable efforts of proselyting which it strictly enjoins ;* that austerity of discipline, which it rigidly prescribes,† and all that novelty and variety

* It amounts perhaps to a practical maxim with the Methodist preachers, “ never to preach where there is not some probability of their obtaining a people to govern :” and hence amongst the rules by which they “ continue, or desist from preaching at any place” is this question. “ Is it advisable for us to preach in as many places as we can without forming any societies ?” To which the following authoritative reply is thus made. “ Answer, by no means : We have made the trial in various places, and that for a considerable time : But all the seed has fallen by the way side. There is scarce any fruit remaining.” (Meth. Dis. 7th Edt. Page 21.)

† It will perhaps be thought by some, that

variety, which its itineration produces. But still, even as secondary causes of this rapid increase of profelytes to Methodism, how evidently defective must those causes now enumerated have remained, if not sustained by the powerful influence, and popular energy of extemporary preaching?

We are now to close, with some few general inferences and observations. And first, from the Apostolic Ecclesiastical system, we infer the falsity of that insinuation so frequently

austere rules of discipline would rather hinder than promote increase of numbers amongst religious communities ; and it must be acknowledged that such rules, would lay an insuperable difficulty in the way of the abandoned and profligate. But as genuine religion imposes on its possessors a strict self-denial of all ungodliness, and unrighteousness ; and requires of them the daily bearing and taking up of the Cross ; or a diligent and continual performance of each Christian duty however difficult : So a system of discipline, although in some respects bordering but too much on the rigours of superstition, may pass with multitudes of well meaning, and upright people, for the uncorrupt discipline of the gospel itself. Whilst others, in order to obtain the reputation of superior sanctity, may be induced to bow their necks to the yoke ; and as appears to have been the case with multitudes of the various descriptions of both Nuns and Monks in the several ages of papal superstition.

quently thrown out by the enemies of Christianity, viz. " That religion and its institutions, by fettering the human mind, are destructive of civil liberty, and accelerate and sustain the usurpations and oppressions of tyranny : " For whilst we admit that superstition and priestcraft have been thus grievously pernicious, we on the contrary maintain, that as the principles of genuine religion form the best basis of all order in civil society, and give the best expansion to the human mind, by elevating it to sublime views of Deity ; so we also consider it as evident, that the Apostolic Ecclesiastical system (as one of religion's great institutions) wherever duly understood and established, must from its own nature powerfully tend to inspire men with just and rational ideas, even of civil liberty ; and thereby render them tenacious of their rights and privileges, whether civil or religious. Secondly. As we have seen the forementioned system to be constitutionally and divinely permanent, so we further infer, that all attempts of Christians to devise forms, or systems of Ecclesiastical government for their respective communities, are not only absurd, as being altogether useless, but are also improper, even in that high degree which implies *criminality* itself.

BUT still it is to be observed, that the Apostolic polity, however well devised, or excellent in its arrangements ; still, its good

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effects

effects must, under the divine blessing, finally result, from a discreet, impartial, and faithful exercise of the powers which it confers on the officers, and distributes amongst the people. For what will avail discipline if relaxed, laws if unenforced, or authority, if with partiality, or but feebly exercised?

AND lastly, we observe, that it should never be forgotten, that even the Apostolic institution of government, however well established, or faithfully administered, still it is not religion itself; but is only designed to subserve the interests of that unaffected piety of heart and life, which constitutes the religion of the Gospel, and which is so exquisitely pourtrayed, in the celebrated 13th Chapter of St. Paul's first Epistle to the Corinthians.



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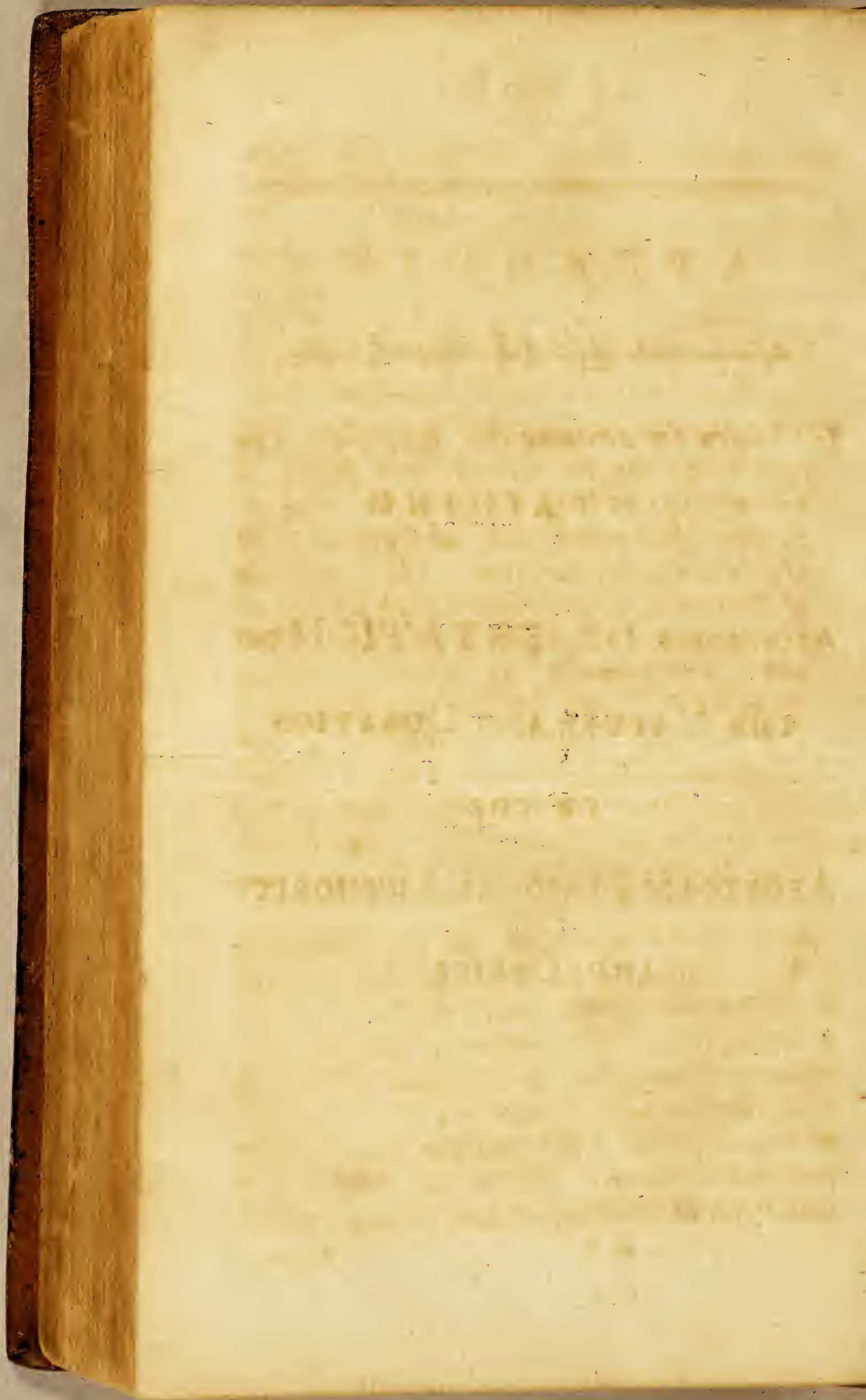
A CONCISE DISSERTATION ON

THE NATURE AND DURATION

OF THE

APOSTOLIC PERSONAL AUTHORITY

AND OFFICE.



A P P E N D I X.

The Reason for annexing this Appendix. The appellation Apostle defined, and shewn to whom, and in what sense ascribed. The Apostolic Office pourtrayed, and proved to be of only temporary duration. The Apostleship of Matthias, a precedent which affords no presumption of a succession of Apostles. Barnabas not properly an Apostle, but an Evangelist. His Mission different from that of Paul. James, the brother of our Lord, proved to be one of the Twelve. Timothy and Titus, proved to be neither Apostles nor Bishops, but Evangelists. Some Objections briefly replied to.

AS on the one hand, in the foregoing Treatise, it has been proved that the Ecclesiastical institution established by the Apostles in the first century, was constitutionally binding on the Christian assemblies of all succeeding generations; so on the other, it was presupposed and implied, that the personal authority, office, and existence of that order of officers, became wholly extinct,

when John, the last surviving Apostle, was removed to reap the reward of his labours : But as this latter position is denied by divines of no small reputation ;* and as the maintenance of it is essential to the result of the foregoing researches ; it therefore becomes indispensable to sustain by argument the presumption in question. And in order to this end it will be necessary, first, to advert to the appellation Apostle, and secondly, to consider with dispassionate candor, the nature of that office to which this appellation properly belonged.

As to the appellation Apostle, it signifies a messenger ; and was immediately and formally conferred by Christ himself on twelve of his disciples, whom he had particularly selected from amongst all the others who had believed on, and followed him. (Luke vi. 13.) But from this Apostleship, Judas having afterwards fallen by transgression, Matthias was divinely and solemnly chosen thereunto by lot. (Acts i. 23, 26.) Whilst to these, another of equal dignity and authority

* “ So long as the gospel constitution continues, there must be such officers in the church as the Apostles were.” *Leaming’s Dissertations*, Page 24.—“ We assert with all antiquity, that our Bishops succeed to the Apostles. They have the government of the church as these had, &c.” *Bowden’s first letter to Dr. Stiles*, Page 45.

ity (2 Cor. xi. 5,) was afterwards added in an extraordinary manner ; so that Paul with the Twelve (and they only) were emphatically and properly Apostles. And it is to be observed, that though some of this number were occasionally, and by way of condescension in a few instances called Elders ; still their true, real, and proper appellation was that of Apostles.

BUT the same authority which had called and set Apostles in the church, instituted and set therein Evangelists also. (Eph. iv. 11.) But Evangelists, although inferior to Apostles, yet as they were of an order superior to that of Pastors and Presbyters, so they were in an honorary manner at times called Apostles. (Acts xiv. 14, — 1 Cor. iv. 6, 9, — xv. 7.) But Apollos, and others of this order, altho thus in a qualified and restricted sense, in a few instances called Apostles ;* still their
true

* Great stress (as well by some of the ancients as by some modern writers, in order to prove a succession of Apostles) has been laid on Phill. ii. 25. "I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and companion in labour, and fellow soldier, but your Messenger, and he that ministered to my wants." Messenger, it is said by them, should have been rendered Apostle, and from thence conclude, that "others were ordained Apostles by those whom our Lord had chosen." But admitting
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true and proper appellation, was that of Evangelists. (Acts xxi. 8,—2 Tim. iv. 5.) With respect to the nature of the Apostolic office itself, and which we are now to consider, it will be expedient in order truly to ascertain it, first, to investigate its origin; and secondly, to trace its progression. As to the former, it is particularly noticed by three of the inspired writers. By Luke it is thus mentioned, "He called unto him his disciples; and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named Apostles." (Ch. vi. 13.) And by Matthew thus, "When he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease. Now the names of the twelve Apostles are these, &c." (x. i. 2.) Whilst Mark relates it after this manner, "He

that the appellation Messenger, should have been here rendered Apostle, still the inference of a succession of Apostles will not follow therefrom; because on examining Chap. iv. ver. 18, "I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you:" it is most glaringly manifest, that Epaphroditus is called the Phillipians' messenger, or Apostle; not because sent back to them by Paul, but because sent by them to him, on an errand of a pecuniary nature. How different then was this commission, or Apostleship, from that of the Twelve, and of Paul?

“He goeth up into a mountain, and calleth unto him whom he would, and they came unto him. And he ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach; and to have power to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils, &c.” (iii. 13, 14, 15.) Here then it is plain from Luke, that Christ when he selected the Twelve, also conferred on them at the same time the appellation of Apostles. Whilst from Matthew we learn, that more than a name was then bestowed on them, viz. Powers of a miraculous nature. And Mark we find to be still more full and explicit on this head; for according to him, they were then ordained first to be with Christ, secondly, that he might send them forth to preach, and thirdly, that they might have power to heal sicknesses, &c. The first part of their office therefore was, personally to have attended upon Christ; but this necessarily ceased at his ascension. Whilst the other parts of it, viz. preaching and working miracles (and to each of which they were expressly ordained) not only continued to be officially performed by the Apostles through the whole of their lives, but were each also afterwards greatly enlarged. And this leads us now to trace the progression, or augmentation of the powers of this office. As to the enlargement of their commission to preach, it occurs in Matt. xxviii. 19, 20, and Mark xvi. 15, as thereby

thereby the whole world, and not Judea only, was assigned for their parish. And the enlargement of their miraculous mission, is intimated in Luke xxiv. 49,—Mark xvi. 16, 17, 18, and in Acts i. 8. Whilst the accomplishment of it took place at, and after Pentecost, when they not only “healed sicknesses and cast out devils;” but also had conferred on them the gift of Tongues, raised the dead, imparted miraculous gifts unto other persons, and performed many other signs and wonders, Acts ii. 4,—iii. 6, 7,—v. 12,—viii. 17,—ix. 40,—xix. 6, &c.

AND in Matt. xvii. 19, we discover a still greater augmentation of the powers of this office; where Christ through Peter thus addresses all the Apostles, “I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven.” And which he thus further ratifies in John xx. 21, 22, 23, “As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And he breathed on them, and saith unto them, receive ye the Holy Ghost, whosoever sins ye remit they are remitted unto them, and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained.” But passing over here in silence, the notion entertained by many, of priestly absolution; we find in this commission, powers referring at once to doctrine and discipline. As to doctrine, the Apostles

postles were, by this commission, empowered
 first, authoritatively to prescribe to mankind
 the terms of salvation, by making known the
 doctrines which they had learned immediate-
 ly from Christ himself, whilst upon earth, or
 which they had thus learned and forgotten,
 and were again reminded of by the Holy
 Ghost. (Mark xvi. 15, 16, John xiv. 26.)
 Secondly, to make known in like manner
 such doctrines as they were taught after the
 ascension of Christ, either by himself imme-
 diately, or by the Holy Ghost; and of which
 nature and kinds were the doctrines which
 St. Paul preached and wrote, who saw not
 Christ before his ascension, and yet who re-
 ceived not the Gospel which he preached of
 man, "but by the revelation of Jesus Christ."
 (Gal. i. 2.) And thirdly, The investiture of
 the Apostles with the doctrinal keys of the
 kingdom, authorized them in their official
 capacity, to determine doubtful and disputed
 points of belief and practice; and an autho-
 rity it was too, which they frequently exer-
 cised in their Epistolary Writings. And that
 this three-fold high doctrinal authority apper-
 tained to the Apostolic office, is a truth so
 obvious, that no person possessed of candor,
 and who duly considers it, can possibly either
 deny or controvert it.* As to the powers of
 discipline

* It is not however to be here understood,
 from any thing which is said above, that the
 Apostles

discipline deposited with the keys of the kingdom in the hands of the Apostles, they were first, such as they exercised themselves, and secondly, such as they transmitted to the churches and officers of that, and of succeeding generations. The former powers were extraordinary, and in some instances strikingly miraculous; as in the case of Peter's detection and punishment of Annanias and Sapphira, of Paul's expulsion of the incestuous person from amongst the Corinthians; and again, of his infliction of blindness on Elymas, the sorcerer. But their powers relating to discipline, which were extraordinary, tho' not of the same miraculous nature with those last mentioned, they implied the divine right and competency, to institute and establish Ecclesiastical laws and arrangements indispensably

Apostles were qualified to decide infallibly either at all times, or on all subjects, on which they might have been consulted; but only, that they were in such a measure instructed by Christ himself, and under such a degree of divine illumination, as enabled them infallibly to understand and teach whatever was essential to salvation, or whatever was indispensably necessary to be so taught by them to the churches for their edification in the present world; but that in things less interesting, they were left to the exercise of their own judgment, as other Christians were. (2 Cor. i. 24; and 1 Cor. vii. 6, 10, 12, 25, &c.)

penfably obligatory on each, and every Chriftian community, throughout all ages ; and which has been rendered fufficiently apparent, in the firft and fecond parts of this Book. But the powers of difcipline and government, which the Apoftles vefted in and tranfmitted to the churches and officers of that, and of fucceeding generations, they were neceffarily not precifely the fame with thofe which were exercifed perfonally by themfelves. And this may be made to appear from analogy in two ways ; firft, from the nature of civil inftitutions of government amongst a free people, and next from the Mofaic eftablifhment. As to the former we will inftance the erection of the Federal government in thefe States. But in contemplating this event, we behold on the one hand, a Convention dividing and, with the approbation of a certain number of the States, giving birth to the prefent happy form of government ; and on the other, we perceive the powers of this inftitution, poffeffed and exercifed by its legislative, judicial, and executive officers. But though the powers of the latter were prefcribed by the former, yet how ftrikingly evident is it, that the powers of the one are, and were effentially and neceffarily different from thofe of the other. Firft, in refpect of degree, becaufe that authority which prefcribes limits to another authority, is manifeftly the greater of the two. And, fecondly,

as to duration ; for though the past official acts of the Convention remain indispensably obligatory, yet there is no repetition of these acts. But even the Convention itself has ceased to exist, whilst that polity to which it gave a being, remains permanent through a succession of Presidents, Senators, and Members of Congress, &c. &c. But as the application of this principle is easy and obvious, we shall therefore pass on to consider the Mosaic institution, where under the authority of a divine mission we behold Moses establishing the priesthood, consecrating Aaron, separating the Levites; and not only erecting a permanent Ecclesiastical system amongst the descendants of Abraham, but also giving them laws and statutes, and himself, in person, even enforcing those laws upon delinquents. But on his decease, although his institutions remain indispensably obligatory, yet no successor arises to him, invested with his personal authority. Upon neither Joshua nor Aaron descends the official mantle of Moses ; nor could it with propriety, unless another institution similar to that erected by Moses, was still necessary to be erected by such successor.

BUT transferring here this argument from Moses to the Apostles, we perceive the latter like the former, to have been invested with extraordinary powers of office, which the peculiarity of their day required, but which
official

official powers became superfluous and inadmissible, as soon as an instituted and permanent condition of the Christian church had taken place.* But lest we should anticipate too far, we will now proceed to consider another interesting particular of the Apostolic office, which was, to testify, as eye witnesses, the resurrection of Christ from the dead. And that this was thus a part of that office, is clearly manifest; first, from Peter's express mention of it as such, in his proposal for appointing a successor to Judas, "Wherefore of these men who have companied with us, all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out amongst us. Beginning from the baptism of John, unto the same day that he was taken up

* Should it be objected, that Moses represented Christ in his official capacity, and not the Apostles; and therefore that the above argument from analogy, is foreign to the point intended, and of course is inconclusive; it may, in that case, be replied, that though Moses in some respects, represented Christ more than he did the Apostles, yet there were others in which he represented the latter much more than he did the former; for Christ came as a son over his own house, and as the shepherd whose the sheep were; whereas Moses came only as a servant, like the Apostles, and as an under shepherd as they were; and hence the analogy is evident and striking, and the reasoning from it in the same proportion, strong and conclusive.

up with us, must one be ordained, to be a witness with us of his resurrection." (Acts i. 21, 22.) And secondly, from Paul's making mention of his having seen Christ as an argument in support of his own Apostleship, "Am I not an Apostle? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?" (1 Cor. ix. 1.) The amount of which argument was, that he had seen Christ after his resurrection, was commissioned by him to testify it, and was therefore truly an Apostle.* But reviewing here concisely, the Apostolic office, we discover it, first, to have implied qualifications and powers essential although not peculiar to Apostles, and secondly, to have exhibited powers of a like essential nature, but possessed by the Apostles only. As to those of the former description, it was first essential that an Apostle should have been a person empowered by a commission derived immediately and expressly from Christ himself, to preach the Gospel in divers places.^a Secondly, that he should have been qualified to confirm by miracles, the doctrines which he thus preached,

* See further on this subject in Acts xxii. 14, 15, and xxvi. 16.

^a Should this assertion, as it has reference to Matthias, be called in question, the doubt will vanish away when it is considered, that Matthias became an Apostle, not through means of a new commission, but by virtue of that to Judas having devolved to him.

ed, and thirdly, that he should also have been qualified to have testified, as an eye witness, to the resurrection of Christ from the dead. But it is particularly to be here remembered, that though these qualifications and powers were essential to the very being of an Apostle, yet these alone, would not have constituted him such, because they appear to have been also possessed by the Seventy, who were not Apostles, but who probably became Evangelists after the ascension of Christ. The conferring of miraculous gifts on other persons, although also essential to Apostles, yet it seems not to have been wholly peculiar to them, as Annanias probably was instrumental in conferring the Holy Ghost upon St. Paul, (Acts ix. 17.) But the deciding authoritatively upon doubtful and controverted points of Christian faith or practice ;* the enacting of laws indispensably obligatory on each Christian church ; the institution of an Ecclesiastical polity, in like manner obligatory ; and the occasional infliction of punishments of a

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miraculous

* The concurrence of the Elders and Church of Jerusalem with the Apostles, in their final decision of the great Jewish controversy, mentioned in Acts xv. can hardly be urged as an exception to the above general position; as the Apostles alone were competent to decisions of that nature, although the others would have been wholly inadequate to such an important undertaking, if wholly separated from the Apostles.

miraculous nature, upon enormous transgressors, appear to have been not only essential, but also peculiar to an Apostle, when exercising the full powers of his mission. But further, in whatever point of view we contemplate this office ; whether we consider the parts of it alone which were essential though not peculiar, or the others only which were both peculiar and essential, or both of them together, it will most strikingly and manifestly appear, not only that this office has long since utterly subsided in the Christian church, but also that its total extinction must have taken place, when John, the last survivor of the Twelve, was removed from the toils of the militant, to the enjoyments of the church triumphant. And although these researches alone afford very conclusive evidence of the utter extinction or cessation of the apostolic Office : still to remove in a greater degree all ground of presumption to the contrary, we will reply to the principal arguments of those who attempt to maintain the perpetuity of this office. And first, they argue in favour of this perpetuity from the circumstance of the investiture of Matthias with the dignity and authority of an Apostle. “ The first thing (they say) the Apostles did after our saviour’s ascension in the exercise of the apostolic office, was to empower Matthias as an Apostle, to supply the place of Judas. From that time he was allowed to be an Apostle,

postle, endowed with the very same power which the eleven had. This is an eminent instance in which the Apostolic power was conferred on one that was constituted an Apostle by the authority Christ gave to the eleven Apostles : which thing the Apostles would not have done, provided their commission could not be transferred to another.^a But it is here certainly most clearly evident, that no general transfer of the Apostolic Office can be infered from this particular instance, unless we violate that first principle reason, " That generals are not contained in particulars, nor can be infered from them." And this is also a particular instance wholly peculiar, and from whence even no other of a like kind can be infered ; because Matthias was chosen only to fill the place of an apostate Apostle, whilst none but Judas thus ever apostatized. And it is likewise further to be observed, that the filling of this vacancy was also connected with other peculiar and extraordinary circumstances ; such as a prophecy respecting it in the Psalms, Acts i. 20 ; and the singular and essential qualifications which Matthias possessed to fill that office ; for he companied with Christ and the Apostles, from the baptism of John until the day of Christ's ascension.* Nor should it here

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^a Leaming's Dissertation, Page 15.

* Qualifications certainly which no candidate in after ages could possibly have possessed.

pass unnoticed, that it is above admitted, that Matthias was after his Apostleship "endowed with the same power which the eleven had;" and consequently like them was enabled to perform miracles: because from hence it will most clearly follow, that any who from the precedent of Matthias' Apostleship will lay claim to a similar investiture with him, are obligated also to exhibit as he did the credentials of their office, in such signs and wonders as the eleven performed.*

But

* *In order to evade the irresistible force of argument, which the want of miracles levels against the assumptions of this office, it has frequently been objected, that the performance of them was no part of the Apostolic Office; but was only the proof or evidence of it. But should we for the sake of argument, even here admit what our opponents thus affirm; still it would be of little advantage to them; because of what avail would the Apostolic mission be if divested of its proofs? We find that even the mission of Christ might have been rejected with impunity; and consequently have proved abortive if unaccompanied by its miraculous evidence. (John xv. 24.) And from hence it is plain, that the Apostolic mission, if also thus destitute of its evidence, would in like manner have been destitute of any authority. For what a king would be without a kingdom, and a governor without a people to rule; so Apostles would*

But should it be still insisted on, that this ordination of Matthias, implies the power of a constitutional transfer of that office to others also. It may then be enquired, where are the instances,

would in some sense have been: that is they would have been in possession of a name which claimed prerogatives that nobody could or would have acknowledged, until they had first perverted their reason, or offered violence to their understandings: And in the same predicament must every person be now, who without the evidence of miracles, lays claim to the dignity and authority of an Apostle; because the miracles wrought by Paul and the Twelve afford no proof of Apostleship being conferred on any but themselves. But whilst for the sake of argument, we thus admit miracles to be only an evidence and not a part of the Apostolic Office, it is to be remembered, we are under no necessity to make this concession; and that not only because that office has already been proved to involve miracles, but also because it is implied in the nature and proof of Christ's own mission, "But I have greater witness than that of John, for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me that the Father hath sent me." (John v. 36.) For here it is evident and incontestable that the miracles which Christ wrought were at once both a part, and the strongest proof of his mission. And as the Father had thus ordained

instances, times, and occasions of such transfer? And where were, or are the regular successors of the other Apostles? Matthias we find obtained the Apostleship of Judas; but who succeeded to Matthias himself? We know indeed by whom claim has been laid to the office and authority of Peter. But who has been the successor of Paul, of John, Matthew, and of the other Apostles? But it will perhaps be replied, that though such a regular succession to this office, cannot now so exactly be traced; yet it is evident there was a constitutional communication of it to other persons besides Paul and the Twelve, because, that "Barnabas is also called an Apostle, and because we know, that he exercised Apostolic authority in ordaining with Paul, Presbyters in every church.^a" And likewise, because we have a plain instance of the transfer of this office "in St. James, our Lord's brother, whom the Apostles constituted an Apostle, and placed over the church of Jerusalem.^b" The Apostleship of Barnabas

ordained and sent forth Christ to perform mighty works, so also it is equally manifest, that Christ ordained and sent forth his Apostles in like manner to fulfil, and at the same time to evidence their commission by the performance of miraculous deeds. (John xx. 21,—Mark iii. 14, 15.)

^a Bowden's first letter to Dr. Stiles, Page 39.

^b Leaming's Dissertations, Page 16.

bas we are now then first to consider, and afterwards that of James. As to the former, its proof here evidently rests on two particulars, viz. First, on his being expressly called an Apostle, and secondly, on his having with St. Paul ordained Presbyters in every church. But it certainly is clearly evident, that these circumstances will not in themselves alone, afford sufficient proof that Barnabas was truly or properly an Apostle; because as already observed, Evangelists were in a restricted and qualified sense, some times called Apostles, even as Apostles were also some times in the way of condescension called Elders. And because that the ordaining of Elders in a variety of churches was not a practice peculiar to the Apostles, but was also commonly performed by Evangelists, who laboured in the planting, and erection of new churches with the Apostles, as their companions and sons in the gospel. But the Apostleship of Barnabas will become still further dubious, when it is recollected that there is not even the shadow of a proof that he ever saw Christ after his resurrection, or received his commission immediately from him, and without each of which, he could not possibly have been truly an Apostle: and still much less is there any evidence that he was endowed with the extraordinary and peculiar powers which we have before seen to have been in the highest degree essential to an Apostle

Apostle truly and properly such. But it will perhaps again be replied, that he must certainly have been truly an Apostle, because evidently constituted one when separated by the express commandment of the Holy Ghost, to labor with Paul amongst the Gentiles; and formally acknowledged such, when James, Cephas, and John, gave to him, as well as to Paul the right hand of fellowship. (Gal. ii. 9.) And further not only because that Paul asserted by argument the Apostleship of Barnabas as really as he did his own. (1 Cor. ix. 5, 6.) But also because the latter manifested equal authority with the former, when, in opposition to the former's opinion and counsel, he took with him John Mark as a companion in labour and travail. To each therefore of these arguments it may now be proper to give a distinct answer. And first, Barnabas is here considered to have been constituted an Apostle when expressly separated by the Holy Ghost to labor amongst the Gentiles. But this was certainly not sufficient, because Philip was as expressly sent by the same divine authority to instruct and baptize the Eunuch, and to Azotus; and yet he was not an Apostle but an Evangelist. And besides, if Barnabas was at the time above mentioned, constituted an Apostle, so also must Paul have been, because he was in the same manner, and at the same time, as explicitly and particularly separated to the same work

work that Barnabas was ; but Paul was not then constituted an Apostle, for he was such long before, as incontestibly appears from Gal. i. 1 to 17, inclusive. Nor will it avail any thing to object, that if Paul had not been an Apostle, prior to the event in question, he would then like Barnabas have become one. As this would be only taking for granted the very point to be proved, viz. that the forementioned separation was competent to have constituted any person an Apostle, and which point we deny.

BUT secondly, our attention is now called to the Apostleship of Barnabas as inferred from the right hand of fellowship which was given him, and which is thus recorded in Gal. ii. 9. "When James, Cephas and John, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, &c." and certainly it is evident that from these premises this inference of Apostleship will not follow ; because this honorary and distinguishing token of Apostolic fellowship, was conferred on Barnabas, not on account of his own mission, but on account of the more honorable one of Paul, whose companion in labor Barnabas was ; nor is this construction, forced but is evidently implied in them emphatical expressions of Paul, "perceived the grace that was given, unto me, &c." Thirdly, with respect to Paul's supporting, by argument, the Apostleship of Barnabas,

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it thus occurs in 1 Cor. ix. 5, 6. "Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other Apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord and Cephas? Or I only and Barnabas, have not we power to forbear working?" But the privileges which Paul claimed here as belonging to himself and Barnabas in common with other Apostles, they evidently consisted on one hand, in a right to forbear from manual labour for their subsistence, and on the other, in an equal right or power to claim an itinerant subsistence for their families also, if they had chose to have been encumbered with such. But certainly the former privilege alone affords no sufficient evidence of Apostleship, because it was a right common to all who preached the gospel, it being so ordained by Christ himself. (verse 14.) Nor did the latter right of itinerant subsistence imply Apostleship in the primary sense of that term; because itinerant labours, and consequently subsistence belonged as really to Evangelists, Itinerants or Apostles in the secondary sense, as it did to those of superior order, and who were truly and properly Apostles. Nor should it pass unnoticed, that Paul, when pleading in behalf of his own Apostleship as distinct from that of Barnabas, makes use of very different arguments from those offered in favour of their Apostleships when combined, viz. "Am I not an Apostle? Have not I seen Jesus

Jesus Christ our Lord? Are ye not my work in the Lord? If I be not an Apostle unto others, yet doubtless I am to you, for the seal of my Apostleship are ye in the Lord.^a" (verses 1, 2.) Lastly, we are to notice the equality of Barnabas' authority with that of Paul, as supposed inferable from his rejection of Paul's counsel in the case of John Mark. But certainly his conduct on that occasion implied no such equality of authority, but rather strongly indicated his weakness and partiality towards Mark, his sister's son; for Barnabas appears evidently to have been in the fault, in departing as he then did, from the labours and station assigned him by the Holy Ghost; and in this light too, it appears it was, that the church of Antioch considered his conduct upon that occasion; for "Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren to the grace of God." (Acts xv. 40.) Whereas no such delirable testimony of

^a *The Corinthians were the seal of his Apostleship, not only because that through means of his Apostolic labours they were "begotten thro the Gospel," (Chap. iv. 15,) but also because, that thro the same means they were enriched with all spiritual and miraculous gifts. (Chap. i. vs. 5, 6, 7.) And which gifts thus imparted to them were indicative of his Apostleship in the highest sense. (Mark xvi. 15 to the 20th, inclusive,—Acts viii. 17, 18, and xix. 6.)*

of approbation, appears to have been thus conferred on the departure of Barnabas. So that from the whole of the foregoing circumstances and considerations, we have no small share of conclusive evidence, that Barnabas was not either truly or properly an Apostle.

BUT the Apostleship of James as distinct from that of the Twelve, and as asserted to be conferred on him by those of that number, we are now particularly to discuss; and which we find to be thus affirmed, viz. "It is very evident he (James) was not of the eleven Apostles. For James, the brother of John, was killed with the sword; and James, the son of Alphaeus, was no relation to our blessed Saviour. But there is mention made of James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas, who are said to be our Lord's brethren. And there can be no doubt that this is the James ordained by the Apostles, and who was placed as an Apostle, over the church of Jerusalem." And again, "St. James, the brother of Jesus, was not one of the Twelve; for in that number there were but two James', viz. The son of Alphaeus, and the son of Zebedee, neither of which was he whom St. Paul calls the Lord's brother; and St. Paul reckons him apart from the Twelve. (1 Cor. xv. 5, 6, 7.) He is not I say one of the Twelve; but if he were, it would make no difference in this dispute; and yet St. Paul
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stiles him an Apostle, Gal. i. 19.^a But in adverting to these quotations, we discover in them two constituent parts, viz. Positive assertions, and arguments supposed to give establishment to those assertions. The assertions are, that "James, the son of Alpheus, was no relation to our blessed Saviour, &c." and that "James, the brother of Jesus, was not of the Twelve." Whilst the arguments offered in support of them, are first, that amongst "the Twelve there were but two James's, viz. The son of Alpheus, and the son of Zebedee;" and from hence the inference is drawn, that neither of those James' "was he whom St. Paul calls the Lord's brother." And secondly, that the James in question was not of the Twelve, because "St. Paul reckons him apart from the Twelve, 1 Cor. xv. 5, 7." But the former of these arguments, and indeed the second also, with both of the assertions, will be sufficiently overthrown, if it can be made appear but even probable,* that Alpheus was the husband of Mary, and the Father of

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^a Bowden's first letter to Dr. Stiles, Page 40.

* Probability is "the very guide of life," and is that which "influences all its great concerns." "For surely a man is as really bound in prudence to do, what upon the whole appears according to the best of his judgment, to be for his happiness, as what he certainly knows to be so." Butler's Analogy, Page 57.

James, the brother of our Lord, and consequently that the latter James, and James of the Twelve were one and the same person. And in proof of these particulars, it is to be observed first, that we are not to consider James, the brother of our Lord, as the son of Mary, the mother of Jesus, but of Mary her sister, mentioned John xix. 25; for it was not unusual amongst the Jews to call first cousins, or even more distant kindred brethren. Secondly, that two of the sons of Alpheus were of the same names, with two of the sons of Mary, viz. James and Judas, and lastly that as Alpheus had two sons who were Apostles, so also had Mary, for St. Paul makes express mention of more than one of our Lord's brethren being Apostles, for on that list, they stand just in the same manner in 1 Cor. ix. 5, as Cephas does, "Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other Apostles, and as the brethren of our Lord and Cephas." And so convincing is this combination of circumstantial evidence, that Alpheus was the husband of Mary, and the father of James the brother of our Lord; that it not only has commanded the belief of persons of no small respectability, but even induced them to assert and maintain these facts; and of which persons I shall now cite two only, viz. the ingenious Mr. Allen, who, in his introductory note, prefixed to the Epistle of Jude, thus remarks, that

"Jude

“Jude stiles himself the brother of James, and was called the son of Alpheus and Mary. Luke vi. 16, and Mark xv. 40.” And the celebrated Mr. Wesley, who, in his note on John xix. 25, is equally in point, “Mary, the wife of Cleopas, called likewise Alpheus, the father, as Mary was the mother of James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas.” Nor is it a difficulty here, that is insurmountable, that the same person should in one place be called Cleopas, and in another Alpheus, and yet be no where, by the same writers, called by both these names together; for Peter is by the same writers in one place called Simon, in another Simon Barjona, and again Cephas, and yet is never by them called by all those names at one time. And the same also may be said of one of the sons, even of Alpheus himself, who, by Matthew, is called Lebbeus—Thaddeus (x. 3,) by Mark Thaddeus only, (iii. 18,) by Luke Judas (vi. 16, Acts i. 13,) and by himself, Jude; (i.) but who is never once, by any of them, called by all those names at the same time. As to the second argument offered above, against James’ being of the Twelve, it is predicated on 1 Cor. xv. 5, 7, “He (Christ after his resurrection) was seen of Cephas, then of the Twelve, after that of James, then of all the Apostles.” But it is utterly unnecessary to dwell on this argument, as a child must perceive its futility; and that if James was not of the Twelve, because

because mentioned thus separately from them; so neither was Cephas for the same reason. But was James' being of the Twelve, and the son of Alpheus, even yet dubious; still, it might be rendered conclusive in another way, viz. by arguing from the inability of that body, to have invested him with Apostolic dignity and authority, equal to that which themselves possessed. For that James was in these respects equal to any one of the Twelve is incontestible, and admitted upon all hands. (Acts xv. 13, xxi. 18, and Gal. ii. 9.) The question therefore is, how came he by this equality? Matthias we have seen to be not inferior to the Eleven, because he obtained the commission of Judas which was the same as their own, whilst his ordination afforded no precedent for any other such instance, as none but Iscariot ever apostatized. And Paul we have seen to have ranked with the Twelve, because like them he received his Apostolic mission at first hand, even immediately and expressly from Christ himself. But when we behold James invested with an authority, and holding a rank, thus equal with Paul and the Twelve, the inference is inevitable, that he also received like them, his commission from Christ himself. And as Christ never thus commissioned any but Paul and the Twelve, it therefore even demonstrably follows, that James was of the Twelve, and consequently the son of Alpheus;

us ; because the other James was slain with the sword, and never presided over the church of Jerusalem. Nor is this a trivial point gained, but is one greatly important; as it utterly destroys all ground of pretence to Episcopal Diocesan claims, founded on the presidency of James over the church of Jerusalem, and over the others of Judea.

To reply formally to every argument that may, or has been offered in support of a perpetuity of the Apostolic Office, is not here intended. But it may be proper to take some notice of one or two more of the principal ones which yet remain. And first, it may be expedient to notice particularly assumptions of the Apostolic Office and authority founded on the office and superintendence of Timothy in Ephesus, and of Titus in Crete; and which may fairly be resolved into the two following propositions, viz. First, that Titus and Timothy “were invested with the commission which Christ gave to his Apostles.” And secondly, that there has been a regular and constant succession, to that order and office, amongst the Bishops of the Christian church from that period down to the present time. But to the former proposition we reply in the negative, for the following reasons; first, because there is no manner of evidence that either Titus or Timothy ever saw Christ, or received the mission of Apostleship from him,
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and without which they could not possibly have been truly or properly Apostles. And secondly, because there is no manner of appearance that they in any one instance either claimed, or exercised any one of the powers peculiar to Apostles, who were such in the proper sense of that appellation. And in reply to the second proposition, we assert that neither Titus nor Timothy were of the same order with those who were called Bishops in the New-Testament;^a nor yet of the Pastors,^b called Angels in the Revelation, and denominated Bishops by Ignatius and others of the second century: And from which assertions if proved or admitted, it will conclusively follow, that the Bishops of the Christian church who claim their descent from

^a The appellation Bishop, as ascribed to a permanent order of officers in the Christian church, is never used in the New-Testament but by St. Paul; and always in that sense so as to belong to meer Presbyters, and which latter is most clearly evident from Acts xx. 28,—Phil. i. 1,—Titus i. 5, 6, 7, and 1 Tim. iii. 1, 2.

^b It has already been observed, and should still particularly be remembered, that these Pastors, or Angels, were not of an order superior to that of Presbyters although of higher rank, because this elevation of rank was conferred on Presbyters not by a second ordination, but merely by the electing voice of each respective community.

from either of these descriptions of Bishops, are also of an order equally different from that of Titus and Timothy, and consequently not Apostles even although the latter had been such.

BUT as the former assertion is both admitted and maintained, by those who are on the opposite of this question, we shall therefore pass on to consider the second, viz. that neither Titus nor Timothy were of the same order with the Pastors called Angels in the Revelation, &c. But in order to obtain full conviction on this head, little more is requisite than merely to form a distinct and accurate idea of their respective offices. And first, as to the office of the Pastors called Angels in the Revelation, and Bishops in the former part of the second century, it was undeniably restricted to the superintendence of a single community, and which community was comprehended within the limits of one city.* And it was essential to this office also,

* *It is not here so much contended for, whether there was, or was not, a plurality of congregations in each Church, City, or Parish, as that there was but one communion table for each Pastor to officiate at, and but one body corporate and Ecclesiastical over which each presided, although it is certain as we have already learned from Mosheim, that there was, generally speaking, but one congregation, and "that so small*

so, that the persons who discharged its obligations, should have remained permanently each within his precinct, so that no interchange took place amongst them, which could have designated their superintendence to have to have been of transient or itinerant kind. Thus Polycarp presided over the church of Smyrna, and over that alone, Ignatius over the church of Antioch, and Clement in like manner at Rome; and each was so restricted to his respective and individual community that he continued to preside therein until his death, unless rent therefrom by the hand of persecution. But it was not thus with the office of Timothy and Titus, for the latter's jurisdiction extended to every city in the then populous island of Crete, (now Candia,) nor was his superintendence there permanent, but transitory, not that of a Bishop, but an Evangelist, and therefore he was soon called away to rejoin St. Paul in itinerant labours at Nicopolis. (Titus iii. 12, 13.) And when his mission was fulfilled in this latter place he returned

small as to be contained in a private House." Nor is it probable, that even in that most numerous church at Jerusalem, there were permanently a plurality of congregations; for at a very early period it was greatly diminished by persecution. (Acts viii. 1.) And it is indubitable, that in its corporate capacity the whole church assembled together in one place. (Acts xv. 12. and xxi. 22.)

returned not to Crete, but departed into Dalmatia. (2 Tim. iv. 10.) And thus too we find it was with Timothy, who was called forth by St. Paul, not to become a located Bishop, but an officer of itinerant order. (Acts xvi. 3.) And hence from Lystra, he goes with Paul to Berca; (xvii. 15;) to Corinth; (xviii. 5;) and from thence is sent forth to evangelize in Macedonia; (xix. 22, 1 Thes. iii. 2;) and from whence he again accompanies Paul into Asia. (Acts xx. 4.) But so continual was the attendance of Timothy on Paul, in itinerant labours, that the former was present at the different times, and in the several places, when the latter wrote no less than six of his Epistles; and which is evident from 2 Cor. i. 1, Phil. i. 1, Col. i. 1, 1 Thes. i. 1, 2, Thes. i. 1, and Philemon i. And although Timothy was besought (not ordained) by Paul, to abide at Ephesus, (1 Tim. i. 3,) yet his continuance was not permanent there, as a Bishop, Pastor, or Angel, but was transient like that of an Evangelist; for he was shortly after called upon by Paul to repair by the way of Troas, to himself at Rome, (2 Tim. iv. 2, 13, 21.) And from Rome, Paul contemplated the departure of Timothy, to water and instruct, not the church of Ephesus but that of Philippi. (Phil. ii. 19 to 22, inclusive, iv. 22.) And therefore from these researches it is clearly manifest, that it will be utterly in vain to attempt to produce the testimony

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either of "Eusebius, or of all antiquity." in order to prove, that Timothy was ordained by St. Paul, the first Bishop of Ephesus, and that Titus was in like manner thus ordained Bishop of Crete; when from the scriptures themselves we have thus such striking and indubitable evidence that both Timothy and Titus were of an order extremely different from that of those persons who were denominated Bishops, in either the first, or the beginning of the second centuries. For as these Bishops were (as we have already seen to be incontestible) limited to, and permanently located in particular and individual churches and cities: So Titus and Timothy presided each in a transient manner over a plurality of churches in different cities, and were therefore of the order of Evangelists, (2 Tim. iv. 5,) whose office it was to perform itinerant labours, in the gathering, planting, and establishing of new churches either in concert with, or under the authority and direction of the Apostles, or when sent forth for this purpose by the immediate and express authority of the Holy Ghost as Barnabas and Philip were. And from hence it will most conclusively follow, that if even Timothy and Titus had been Apostles, yet no Bishops whatsoever who were the successors of those of antiquity, could from thence have justly laid claim to the Apostolic office, as the order and office of such Bishops, was never the same with

with the order and office of Titus and Timothy.

BUT it has been seriously objected "that God having set three orders in his church, viz. Of Apostles, Presbyters and Deacons; and that having never formally repealed this threefold divine institution, it of course must remain permanent, and still must have existence in the Christian church, &c." To which we reply, first, that the number of orders, divinely set in the Christian church, was not that of three, but of five; viz. that of Apostles, of Evangelists, of Prophets, of Elders, of Presbyters, and of Deacons. (Eph. iv. ii. 1 Cor. xii. 28.) And secondly, that as the Almighty removed away out of the church by death, all who had been placed therein of the first three orders, and neither replaced them by others after the same manner in which the first Apostles, Evangelists, and Prophets, had been instituted, nor made any other provision whereby such officers could afterwards be constituted, that of course no formal repeal of these orders was requisite in order to abolish them, because their existence as to a succession, became, under these circumstances, utterly impracticable and impossible.

BUT as to the two latter orders, viz. of Bishops, and Deacons, or what is the same thing of Presbyters and Deacons, they were evidently rendered permanent through means
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of particular provision being made, and special directions given for the institution and consecration of such officers. (1 Tim. iii.—Titus i.) And in which orders there has undeniably been a perpetual succession from the days of the Apostles to the present time.

BUT it will perhaps be further objected, (and arguments, and objections of this nature have been offered) that the Apostolic office and order have also existed from the time of the Apostles down to the present day, in the Diocesan Bishops; because that Athanasius and others of the ancient Christian writers, did not hesitate to call the Bishops of the first ages Apostles, and have represented them as succeeding to the place and authority of the Apostles properly such. To this we would answer, that though we should admit the premises, yet the conclusion will not follow; * because the primitive Fathers made such great use of metaphor and hyperbole in their writings, that unless we make very considerable allowance for their figurative expressions, we shall on important occasions wander wide from the true meaning of these venerable authors; for if we infer that the Bishops of antiquity were of Apostolic rank and order, merely because Ignatius and others

* But we do not admit the premises, for we deny that diocesan Bishops had any place in the Christian church, so early as the time of the Apostles.

ers of the Fathers, have in a figurative and unguarded manner ascribed to them the appellation and character of Apostles, then by the same method of reasoning we may from the Epistles of Ignatius infer that the Presbyters too were Apostles, and that the Bishops were infinitely more than human. For he thus writes, "All you of the church of Smyrna obey your Bishop, as Jesus Christ did the Father, and the Presbyters as the Apostles." And again, "My soul for them that obey their Bishop, I exhort you to do every thing in the unity of God, the Bishops presiding in the place of God, and the Presbyters in the place of the council of the Apostles.^a"

BUT should this answer be deemed insufficient, and should it be still insisted on, that the Diocesan Bishops have ever been, and still are truly and properly Apostles : Then let it be observed that this most preposterous consequence will most infallibly follow therefrom, viz. That every doctrine offered for belief under the assertion of divine authority, and each injunction delivered in like manner for the regulation of life and manners, whether by the Bishops of Rome, or by any others of like order, and however inconsistent with each other, or repugnant to the holy scriptures such doctrines and injunctions may be ; still they are all as indispensably obligatory on each Christian, and on each

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^a *King's Inquiry*, Pages 169, 170.

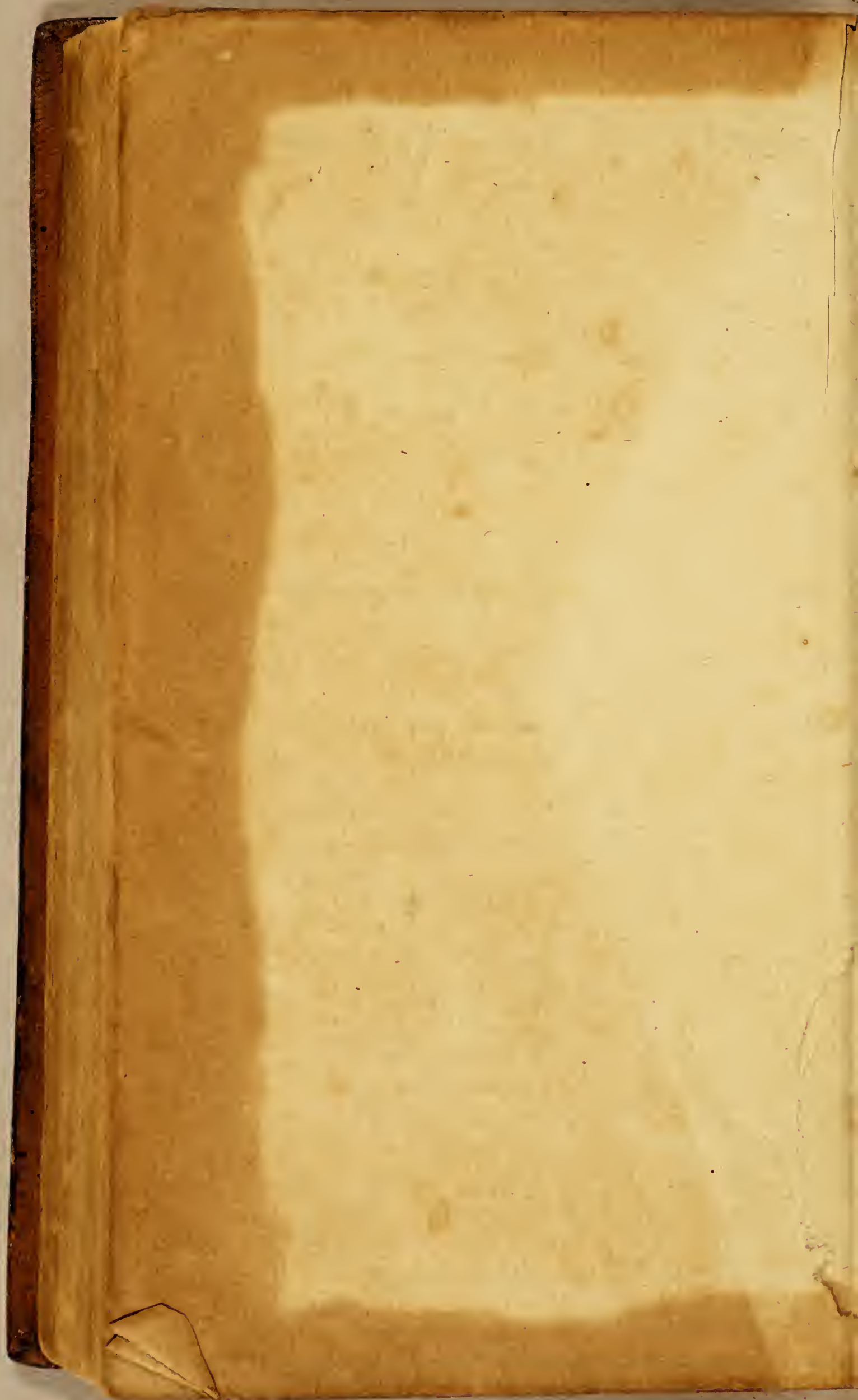
Christian community as the doctrines and precepts delivered by Paul and the Twelve are. Nor is there any possibility of avoiding this most absurd conclusion, whilst this equality of Apostleship in Diocesan Bishops, is thus maintained: For if Diocesan Bishops, and Paul and the Twelve are all Apostles of the same order and authority; then if we may call in question or reject what the former propose to us as intrusted with them from the Almighty for our instruction and government; so we may in like manner call in question and reject whatever Paul and the Twelve have propounded to, and enjoined upon us, as coming from God thro them to us; and consequently all that is taught or commanded us by the Apostles in the New-Testament, may at discretion, be called in question, and rejected by us; because our own judgments, and not the writings of the Apostles must in such case become the criterions of our belief, and the guides of our conduct. But it is now time to close this subject, as it will be improper to pursue further, a controversy already exhausted through discussion; and decriped by reason of age.

T H E E N D.

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ERRATA.

- Page 6—3d Line from bottom—Instead of *faithfully*,
read *have* faithfully.
- 53—7th from bottom—For *Parents*, read *Parent*.
- 72—14th from top—For the world, read the
Christian world.
- 87—2d from bottom—For this a point, read
this *is* a point.
- 100—12th from bottom—For a third, read *and*
a third.
- 168—2d from bottom—For *those* read *these*.
- 169—13th from top—Instead of *prior to that*
event, read *for prior to that event*.
- 211—13th from top—*for* reason, read *of* reason.
- 218—10th from bottom—For subsistence read
itinerant subsistence.
- 218—9th from bottom—*dele* the word *itinerants*.
- 228—4th from top—*dele* *to have*.



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